CALIFORNIA FREEZING *TG* GOES CAMPING IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

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BUGATTI: THE FUTURE

CEO Mate Rimac talks Tourbillon Roadster, non hybrid V16s and Elon Musk

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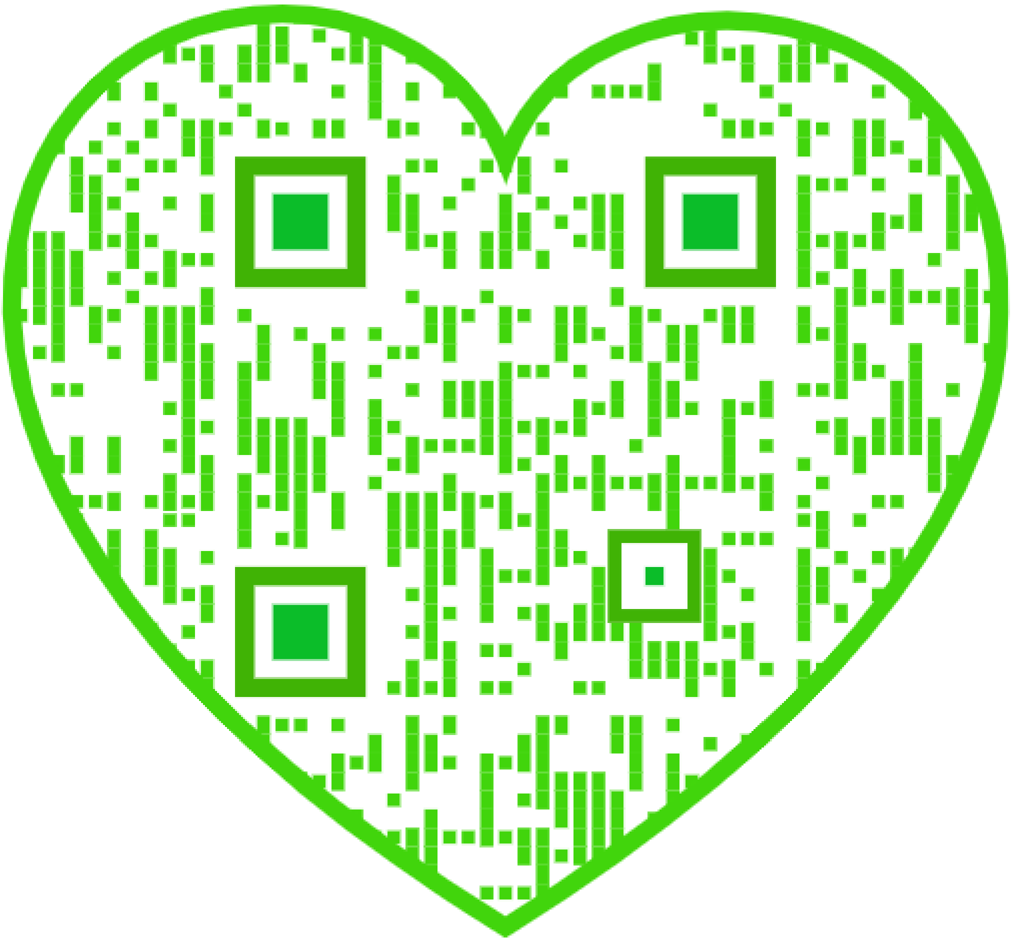

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JACK RIX

Editor-in-chief

@jack_rix
@rixjack
jack.rix@bbctopgearmagazine.com

Issue 395

In this issue we drive a £4m track only Bugatti. Be honest, did you even flinch when you read £4m? It's a preposterous amount of money – enough to buy 13 average UK houses or, more sensibly, 667,779 copies of your favourite car magazine – but my point is we're being desensitised to the prices of rare and exclusive cars because they've long since detached from reality, and appear to be calculated based on a random phone number then adding four zeros.

As a snotty faced kid in the early 1990s, I used to drive past the McLaren F1 in the Park Lane dealership and roll that asking price (£600k – £1.3m adjusted for today's prices) around my head in disbelief. Then came the Veyron that smashed through the £1m barrier and purveyors of fine automobiles haven't looked back since.

There's no longer an incentive to sell at a 'sensible' price, because then you might have to find tens of thousands of customers to make the numbers add up, which is quite a lot of hard work. Far better to find tens, or at most a few hundred collectors with unlimited funds who'll have one of everything, and bang up the price until the balance sheet looks better.

Take the Alfa 33 Stradale, loosely based on a Maserati MC20 (full series production model, no limit on numbers, prices starting from £225k). You could argue the Alfa's body is several notches more exotic and the interior looks quite a bit more special... but £1.7m more special? Limiting it to 33 units helps justify the price, but you get my point.

It's even happening at the accessible end of the performance car spectrum, where the most recent versions of Toyota's GR Yaris and Honda's Civic Type R have both had import numbers slashed and prices whacked up. Then there's the mother of them all, the new Renault 5 Turbo 3E – limited to 1,980 cars and yours for over £200k if you really lean into the customisation on offer.

A halo car's purpose is to cast a warm glow on the whole company, and to do that they don't need to be on every street corner, they just need to exist – on YouTube, in folklore and on the pages of magazines like the one you're holding. So I acknowledge that *TopGear* is both part of the problem, and part of the solution – we drive this unobtainium because 99.9 per cent of us can't afford it, but we all need to dream.

Enjoy the issue,

CONTRIBUTORS

WHO: *OLLIE MARRIAGE*

We sent dog whisperer Ollie to work with a very different beast... an AA liveried Maserati MC20 in the Highlands

WHO: *VIJAY PATTNI*

Born and bred in the home of Vauxhall, no surprises that Vijay's hero car is a Calibra. But did the reality match up to the dream?

WHO: *JOHN WYCHERLEY*

Delighted to confirm photographer John lost zero shutter-clicking fingers (or toes) to frostbite on this camping trip to the Arctic

JACK RIX
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

DEPUTY EDITOR Ollie Kew
HEAD OF CAR TESTING Oliver Marriage
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Tom Ford
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EDITOR AT LARGE Jason Barlow
US CORRESPONDENT Pat Devereux
DIGITAL DIRECTOR Simon Bond
HEAD OF VIDEO Charlie Rose

BRAND MANAGING EDITOR Esther Neve
SUB-EDITORS Sam Burnett, Peter Rawlins
EDITOR, TOPGEAR.COM Vijay Pattni
DIGITAL REVIEWS EDITOR Joe Holding
DIGITAL FEATURES EDITOR Greg Potts
STAFF WRITERS Cat Dow, Shafiq Abidin
WEB PRODUCER Callum Alexander
HEAD OF CONTENT STRATEGY Rowan Horncastle
DIGITAL CONTENT PRODUCER Ben Pulman

ART TEAM
CREATIVE DIRECTOR Andy Franklin
ART EDITOR Elliott Webb

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Jethro Bovingdon, Mike Channell, Richard Holt, Sam Philip

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS
Lee Brimble, Mark Fagelson, Jonny Fleetwood, Wilson Hennessy, Rowan Horncastle, Olgun Kordal, Jamie Lipman, Dennis Noten, Richard Pardon, Mark Riccioni, Philipp Rupprecht, John Wycherley

HEAD OF CLIENTS AND STRATEGY Phil Holland
AGENCY ADVERTISING MANAGER Stacey Chiu
DIGITAL TRADING DIRECTOR James Walmsley
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REGIONAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER Tom Mallows
HEAD OF INSERTS Steve Cobb
SALES EXECUTIVE Matthew Wood
DIGITAL SALES PLANNING MANAGER Isabel Burman
DIGITAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER Lindsey Dobson

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Koli Pickersgill
GROUP PRODUCTION, SUSTAINABILITY & ETHICAL MANAGER Jo Beattie
SENIOR PRODUCTION CONTROLLER Katie Panayi
SENIOR REPRO TECHNICIAN Darren McCubbin
HEAD OF AD SERVICES Eleanor Parkman-Eason
SENIOR AD SERVICES COORDINATORS Cherine Robins, James Webb
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GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR Stephen Lavin
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BBC STUDIOS, UK PUBLISHING
GLOBAL DIRECTOR, MAGAZINES Mandy Thwaites
ASSISTANT PROJECT MANAGER Eva Abramik
COMPLIANCE MANAGER Cameron McEwan

SENIOR VP, DIGITAL [GLOBAL BRANDS & LICENSING] Jasmine Dawson
DIGITAL VP, AUTOS Chris Mooney

EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD Alex Renton

WWW.BBCSTUDIOS.COM UK.PUBLISHING@BBC.COM /

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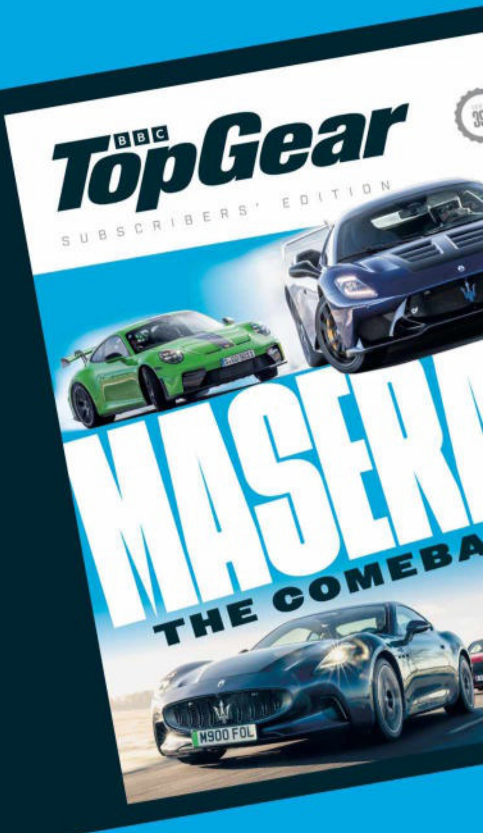

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TURN TO PAGE 036

THE MOST POWERFUL
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RENAULT 5
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Renault 5 is number 1

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These awards are an immense source of pride for all of us at Renault.

And we hope you'll take pride on the road, every time you
fire up your piece of the French Revolution.

alloy wheels shown available up to techno trim

16
NO STEP
BUGATTI

038

BUGATTI BOLIDE
Ignore the sign, step this way for our exclusive drive in the 1,578bhp Bolide. That's track days ruined forever

MAY

Contents

TRENDING 013
COLUMNS 030
FEATURES 038
RETRO 105
DRIVEN 114
GARAGE 126
THE HOT LIST 141

086

MASERATI MC20

105

THE JUNKYARD

TG's rough guide to
BUGATTI
Everything worth knowing about the world's fastest car company

057

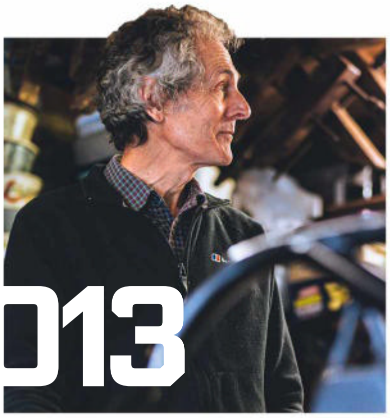
GUIDE TO BUGATTI

066

VW ID.EVERY1
Can Volkswagen's entry level offering help the company to beat its recent electric blues?

074

VOLKSWAGEN CALIFORNIA



013

NIC MANN

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TRENDING

142

UNSUNG HEROES WITH UNHEALTHY OBSESSIONS

WHEEL NUT

Mann made machine

Meet the Mannic Beattie, a homemade shed build complete with an auxiliary jet engine

WORDS JASON BARLOW
PHOTOS HUCKLEBERRY MOUNTAIN

Nic Mann hands me a turbine blade. This, he says with a gleam in his eye, was originally part of the Rolls-Royce Olympus 593 turbojet that powered Concorde. Nic worked on that fearsome engine during his time at the aerospace giant in the 1970s, and remains transfixed by turbines. So much so that he's used one to circumvent the lag in his hillclimb special, the Mannic Beattie. Except that 'special' doesn't even get close to describing this thing. Nic is supremely modest but his creation is close in spirit and execution to an F1 car. The kicker is, he designed, engineered and built it in his Berkshire garage for about £20k.

“You’ll detect a whooshing sound, that’s the turbine spinning at 90,000rpm”

UNSUNG HEROES WITH UNHEALTHY OBSESSIONS

WHEEL NUT

Nic also rents his racer out to the council to clear gum off the pavement

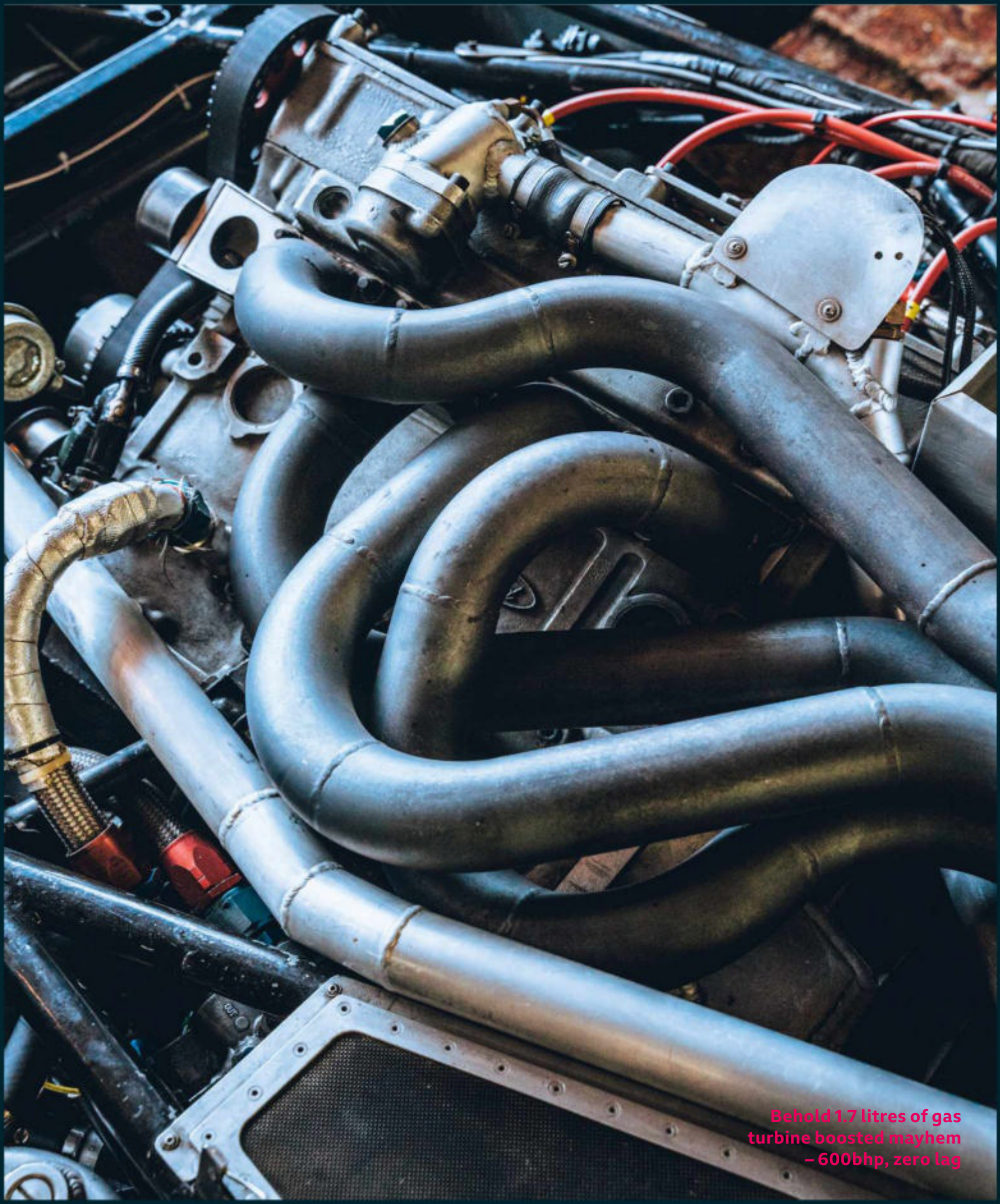
OIL
PUMP
ON
TURBO
IDLE
OFF
LOG

A beloved statesman of the hillclimb scene, Nic transformed his mother's Morris Minor in phases until it was running a turbocharged Rover V8 with throttle modulated nitrous injection to the tune of about 550bhp. It was hooked up to a Jaguar XJ6 driveline and its torque outputs would regularly overwhelm the gearbox. Nic ran a 30.07secs up Shelsley Walsh in the Moggie in 1986, only half a second slower than World Rally champion Hannu Mikkola in a works Audi Sport Quattro.

He sold the Morris in 1990 and used the funds to start the next project. Nic wanted to create a record breaker, and inspired by the Mallock U2 single seater, all the usual parameters came into play – go big on the mechanical grip while reducing the centre of gravity, optimise the weight distribution, minimise the effects of lateral weight transfer. It would be all wheel drive, have a flat floor and huge wings. After which, Nic headed down a more idiosyncratic path. The engine is a four pot 1.7-litre Cosworth BDT (a staple of many a fast Ford, including the Group B RS200), canted over at 25° on the intake side to help the centre of gravity. That was good for about 400bhp, which meant Nic needed forced induction to make the numbers he wanted. And that meant lag, which he didn't want. Enter a compact gas turbine, originally used as an auxiliary power unit in helicopters.

Watch the car in action and you'll detect a distinctive whooshing sound as Nic prepares to launch himself up a hill. That's the turbine, spinning at 90,000rpm. It's started by compressed air using an external starter but only after the main engine has been fired up. An ingenious but complex solution, my head spins almost as fast as the turbine as Nic explains how it works. Basically, it runs separately from the ICE and delivers air to it at a constant pressure independent of the main engine speed. Ergo, zero lag, and an overall power output of 600bhp (give or take).

The transmission is from the Ford Sierra XR4x4, a tidy setup that features epicyclic transfer gear and a viscous coupling. The front and rear diffs are from a Lotus Elan, the front suspension uprights a MkII VW Golf GTI, the rears from a Ralt single seater. Nic fabricated the chassis from CDS steel tubing, and laid up the composite panels on the front wings himself. Yep, that's homemade carbon fibre. The big aero parts are made of sheet aluminium, the sidepods of birch plywood.



Behold 1.7 litres of gas turbine boosted mayhem – 600bhp, zero lag

Has anyone seen the plywood side table from the living room? Wait, never mind

When Nic became acquainted with former BAR and Ferrari F1 aerodynamicist Willem Toet, himself a successful hillclimber, it helped finesse his instincts on downforce. He also verified his thinking using F1 grade computational fluid dynamics tools (thanks to Miqdad Ali). Which is how Nic's home brew racer ended up with a blown rear diffuser that helps drop the ride height by 40mm at 140mph, a high rake stance not dissimilar to the 2021 Red Bull RB16, and an aerodynamic centre of pressure that would get Adrian Newey's attention. At 100mph, it produces well over its own weight in downforce, Nic says, so somewhere in the region of 750kg. The car has also set and broken all sorts of records, and holds the Shelsley specials record with a time of 25.47 seconds.

That the man is still chasing tenths at the age of 73 is just as impressive. "But it's time to hand it over to someone else, which is one of the reasons I'm talking to you," he says a little ruefully. "If anyone gets in touch, let me know." *TG* is happy to help…

R5TURBO 3E
RENAULT
R5TURBO 3E

NEW METAL

5 to survive

The reborn R5 Turbo gets 536bhp, a massive 3,540lb ft of torque and a rally style handbrake

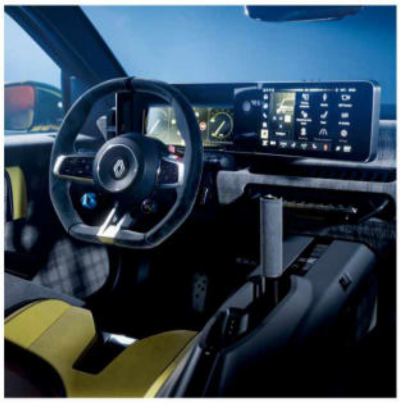
WORDS: VIJAY PATTNI

THE RENAULT 5 TURBO 3E APPEARS TO be getting angrier, and… actually we quite like it when it's angry. Because since it first burst onto the scene in a haze of tyre smoke and EV squeal, it's grown from 500bhp to 536bhp.

More than that, it's able to pump out a whopping 3,540lb ft of torque, which is a) enough to give it a blistering 0–62mph time of under 3.5 seconds, but mostly b) downright terrifying.

So, welcome again to the future of Renault hot hatchery. The reincarnation of its 1980s hero gets 268bhp motors hiding in each back wheel, and a 70kWh battery in the floor. It's built around a bespoke aluminium platform developed by Alpine, developed specifically to be rear wheel drive, and swaddled in carbon fibre panels.

So the windscreen's a bit further back than in the standard Renault 5 EV, the wheelbase is longer, and the whole car is phat as hell. All in it weighs 1,450kg, and can reach speeds of 168mph flat out.



Inside it gets a very spartan, race bred interior. Indeed this is our first look at the R5 Turbo's insides, and… it barely qualifies as a road car. There are a pair of digital displays in front of the driver measuring 10.1in and 10.25in for all your data, a pair of bucket seats with six point harnesses, lots of carbon and Alcantara and – wahey! – a rally style vertical handbrake. But that's it.

Naturally, you'll be able to tailor your own R5 Turbo with a range of options including the original launch colours from the 1980s cars, along with interior trim customisation too. Which you'd expect for its target price: though Renault hasn't confirmed the cost, you can bank on something over £120k, and nearly double that after you've ticked a few boxes.

There'll be 1,980 of these built (geddit?), each will be numbered, and they'll be squaring down your local supercar meet from 2027 onwards. Just don't make it angry, you actually might like it when it's angry.

HIT or MISS

Two titans of the editorial team have it out

JACK RIX

TG'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF THINKS THE 5 TURBO CAN DO NO WRONG

I tried, I really did, to engage my rational brain lobe and dismiss this as an overpriced, overweight marketing tool, but I kept getting sucked back in. The performance figures are suitably bonkers – nothing particularly new about that with fast EVs – but what is new is the level of lunacy applied to the design. It looks like a standard Renault 5 that's been dipped in growth hormone. Then there's the exotic in-wheel motors and the commitment to making it as extreme as possible with the roll cage and rally handbrake. Yes, the price is pretty wild, but it's basically an entirely new car from the ground up and has there ever been a more exciting electric vehicle? The answer is no.

> **"It looks like an R5 that's been dipped in growth hormone"**

OLLIE MARRIAGE

TG'S HEAD OF CAR TESTING HAS DOUBTS. MANY DOUBTS...

I'm concerned about this. Yes, it looks cool and I'm sure it'll be fast, but what do we know about cars like this? They're always watered down versions of the concept. I drove that concept, the Turbo 3E, a couple of years back. They'd given the 375bhp hot hatch a hydraulic handbrake and 50° of steering lock for maximum driftability, but I still came away from it a bit lukewarm. And yes, the production version will be faster still. But we all know that more speed doesn't equal more fun in EV land. And Renault has already had a run at an electric hot hatch with the Alpine A290 and... it's fine... kinda. And why's this not badged an Alpine? And why's it £120k?

> **"We all know more speed doesn't equal more fun"**

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

Kids review kits

This month, Oliver, 8, builds the LEGO® City F1® Truck with RB20 & AMR24 F1® Cars

THIS SET IS JUST REALLY FUN TO BUILD, I'd give it five stars out of five. In total, I have about 20 or 30 random LEGO sets at home, but this is the biggest one I've ever built.

The instructions are easy to follow, and I like that there are lots of moving parts, because I get to discover how they move – and how they stop. The trickiest part has been a couple of side bits on the truck that kept falling off, but eventually I realised you had to put the next part on to stop them from falling off!

I'm going to store all my LEGO cars in the truck, because it comes with two cars to put in. The truck has big doors that come out, then you can wheel the cars in and wheel them out. I would definitely recommend building this to my friends.

TO GET YOUR HANDS ON THIS AND OTHER FUN LEGO SETS, VISIT LEGO.COM NOW

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THE GOOD

It's new, but then it isn't. Love the looks

Frank Baeyens f

Stunning. A proper sports car

Daniel Harris f

Well done Morgan. Great looking thing

Yarbles TG

IT LOOKS ABSOLUTELY AMAZING

Peterson TG

THE BAD

Why would anyone design a rear end like that? Really disappointing

Disappointed TG

Looks like a badly rendered concept for a restomod Morgan

Still nobody TG

STILL AN AUTO. GO AWAY

HANS EFDÉ f

It's 30 grand too expensive

Oscar Sanchez Fernandez TG

Looks like an old Morgan with a Citroen DS boot stuck on it

Khunwilko TG

THE UGLY

The styling department must have taken all of 20mins to come up with that...

Jerry Myer f

WHAT A HORRIFIC COLOUR

Alan Scott f

Dreadful pastiche

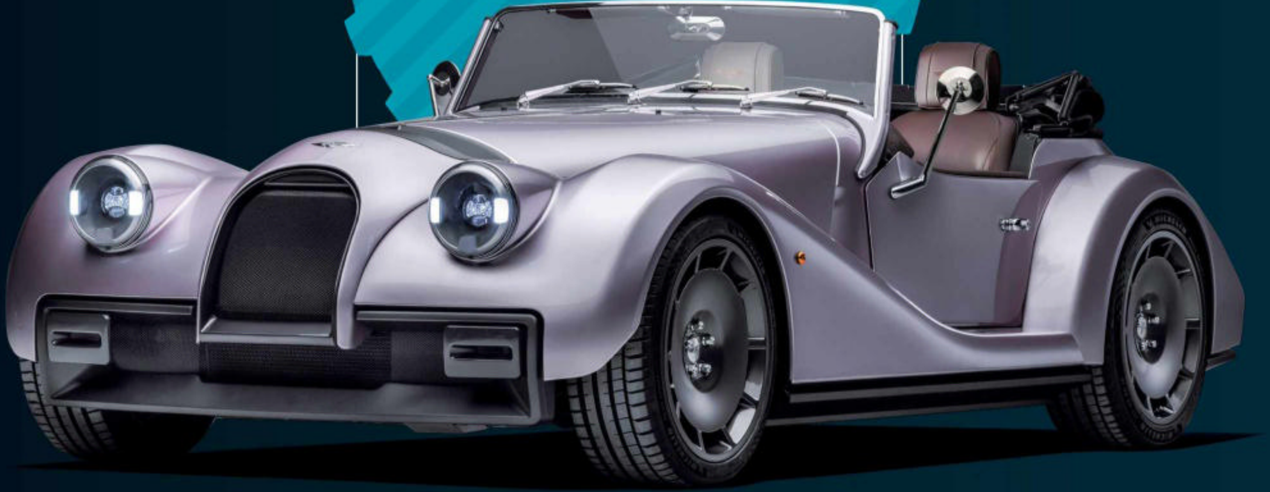
Adam Howard f

It's about as cool as Clarkson in a leopard skin jumpsuit

Jerry Myer f

COMMENTS

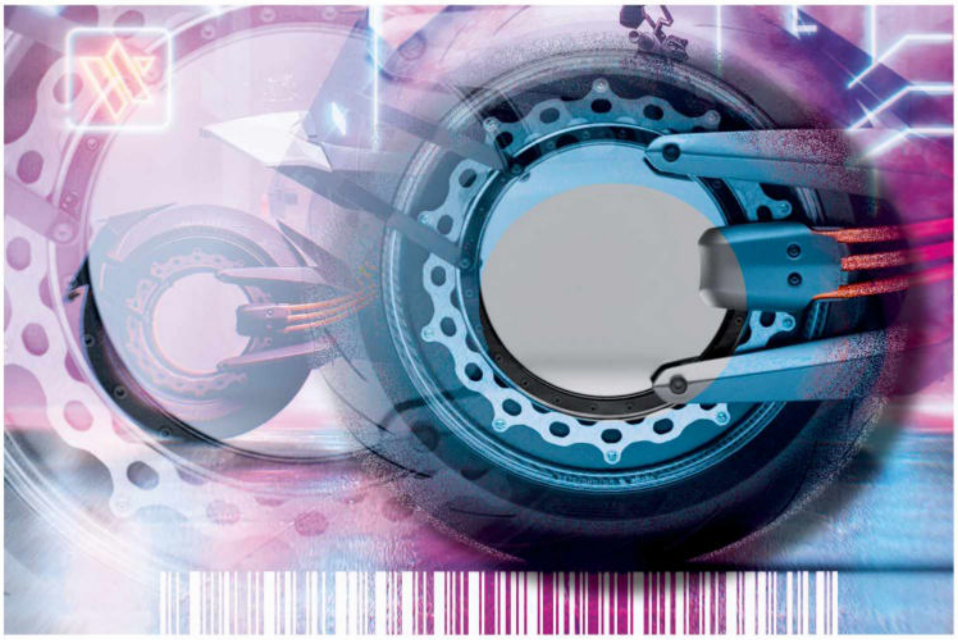
MORGAN SUPERSPORT



THIS IS THE BRAND NEW MORGAN SUPERSPORT – A BMW engined (3.0-litre straight six, 8spd auto) sports car soaked in Malvern's long, storied history and garnished with real, actual usability Morgan hopes you'd want to sample every day.

"We've really focused on making this a car that you can jump in and grab by the scruff of the neck, and just really, really drive," Morgan boss Matthew Hole told *TG*. "And we've hopefully put as many features into the car that mean you want to do that all the time rather than some of the time." It's a genuine long ball attempt at transforming the range topping Morgan from a weekend when the weather's just right and the moon is in retrograde car, to something that'd make you pause before going into a Porsche dealership.

Prices start from £105k, and Morgan's aiming for around 650 cars this year, with an ambition to get back up to around 800 a year. Consider it an exclusive daily, then. **VIJAY PATTNI**



NEXT BIG THING

IN WHEEL MOTORS

WORDS: PAUL HORRELL

IN WHEEL MOTORS ARE ON THE VERGE of real applications. That's a terrible pun: the Verge motorcycle has one. It looks dramatic, with no central hub or axle. Verge is part of Donut Lab, a Finnish builder of motors in the shape of donuts.

The idea is wonderfully simple. A normal motor's rotor, the spinning bit, is inside, with its output shaft emerging from the centre. The stator, the coil windings that don't turn, is fixed to the outer casing. A wheel motor flips that layout inside out. The rotor is on the outside diameter, in unit with the wheel rim and so driving it. The stator is fixed to the suspension. The large diameter means much more torque than usual, so there's no need for the reduction gears that come with inboard motors.

No gears, no driveshafts, and so less friction and complication and weight. On a RWD car – as the Renault 5 Turbo 3E will be – each rear wheel has its own torque control for ultra capable torque vectoring and all sorts of drift modes.

Better yet, there are exciting possibilities for design and packaging. Removing the centre mounted motor and gears and diff and driveshafts will leave fresh space for batteries, luggage or crash zones. So the car can be rangier, roomier and shorter in overhang.

There is one obvious objection, but it turns out to be far less significant than I'd guessed. Wheel motors *look* heavy, and unsprung rotating mass is bad for dynamics. But actually these power dense motors weigh little. And a decade ago, with another pioneer Protean's wheel motors in mind, Lotus Engineering did a study on a Ford Focus MkII. Drivers tested it before and after the engineers added unsprung mass – 15kg rotating and 15kg static – to each corner. Handling, grip, ride, steering and refinement all suffered. But in the opinion of Lotus, nothing that couldn't be regained by normal suspension tuning.

Besides – and this is me talking not them – if a car is RWD, then the front wheels and suspension stay as is. Which minimises the effects on steering weight and feel, and respose difference due to extra gyroscopic interference.

Mind you, given the big manufacturers have invested squillions in EV platforms with central motors, world domination is some way off for this new invention. I say new. Wheel motors were first used in the Lohner-Porsche hybrid in... 1901.

#11

THE VAPOURWARE FILES

THIS MONTH:
KEATING BERUS

What is it?

The final roll of the dice from Bolton's premier purveyor of not real hypercars, Keating.

Following the SKR and TKR of the mid 2000s (which did apparently get built in tiny numbers and run, briefly) and the meaningless 'Bolt' of 2013, the Berus was a rendering, sorry, a supercar designed to put Keating's cat among the exotic pigeons.

The Berus promised a 0–60 time of 2.4 seconds, and a 230mph top speed from a V8 engine. If that wasn't ambitious enough, an electric version was also promised, with over 1,000lb ft of torque.

Did they build any?

Amazingly, the Berus did make the leap from pixels to reality – briefly. A prototype was seen in the car park of Bolton University, crashing into a skip. You can find the clip online. We're not aware anyone was hurt, fortunately.

Where are they now?

After years of guff about taking on the supercar establishment, Keating finally went bust in 2021. Probably for the best.

WATCHES

Tick-tock, hip-hop

Whether you yearn for a 'big face Rollie' or 'matching Daytonas' there's a rap-inspired watch for you

WORDS: RICHARD HOLT

HIP-HOP ARTISTS HAVE COME IN for a lot of criticism over the years. Misogyny and homophobia, the glorification of drugs and violence… and that's even before you get into the genre's crimes against cars and watches. If a car has oversized rims or any kind of jewellery encrusted wrap, you can be pretty sure hip hop is to blame. Same with watches. A big blingy watch became part of the look from the early days.

One serial offender Slick Rick has a reputation for wearing gold chains big enough to make Mr T look shy and retiring, matched to watches that do their very best to compete. He once kept on adding new bits to a favourite watch until it ended up with multiple diamond encrusted bezels that looked like Saturn's rings, a sparkling gold wrist adornment the size of a saucer with a tiny watch face. This Ludicrous mode approach to watches has made him a legend in his own lifetime.

Big money doesn't just mean gold and diamonds, though. Moguls like Jay-Z and Drake have channelled significant revenue into very well respected collections of mega rare watches. But you don't need to sell any hit records to buy a watch with hip-hop credentials. Yes, Rolex is the most rapped about brand, but plenty of other rappers have opted for more affordable makes, like the other three on this page. So you can show your hip-hop appreciation for very little money, without a precious stone in sight.

PRO TIP

Go big. Rappers are not overly concerned with modesty – hip-hop style is about letting everyone know that your album has gone triple platinum. So while you can't go wrong with gold and diamonds, precious metal and stones are not the only way. If you are low on funds, choose something big and bold with a nice splash of colour and you can't go far wrong.

BLOW THE BUDGET

Rolex Day-Date

For many people this is the ultimate Rolex, and it has been the watch of choice for countless rappers. It cuts an imposing figure, with the 36mm or 40mm case coming in a choice of golds or platinum. With a patented three link bracelet heftily crafted in matching precious metal. Prices rise steeply if you choose to add precious stones. £34,300; Rolex.com

UNDER £1,500

Seiko Prospex 1965

Japan's first diving watch, the Prospex was tested in icy Antarctic waters in the 1960s. This new incarnation has vintage inspired looks that have caught the eye of British rapper Aitch. It has a three day power reserve and water resistance to 300m. £1,200; seikoboutique.co.uk

UNDER £500

TW Steel Classic Canteen

The young-ish Dutch company's big bold designs have seduced a number of rappers, including Ice Cube. This one has a 45mm steel case that houses a Seiko automatic movement. A nice, big, well made watch on a leather strap for not too much money. £499; uk.twsteel.com

UNDER £100

Casio G-Shock DW-6900

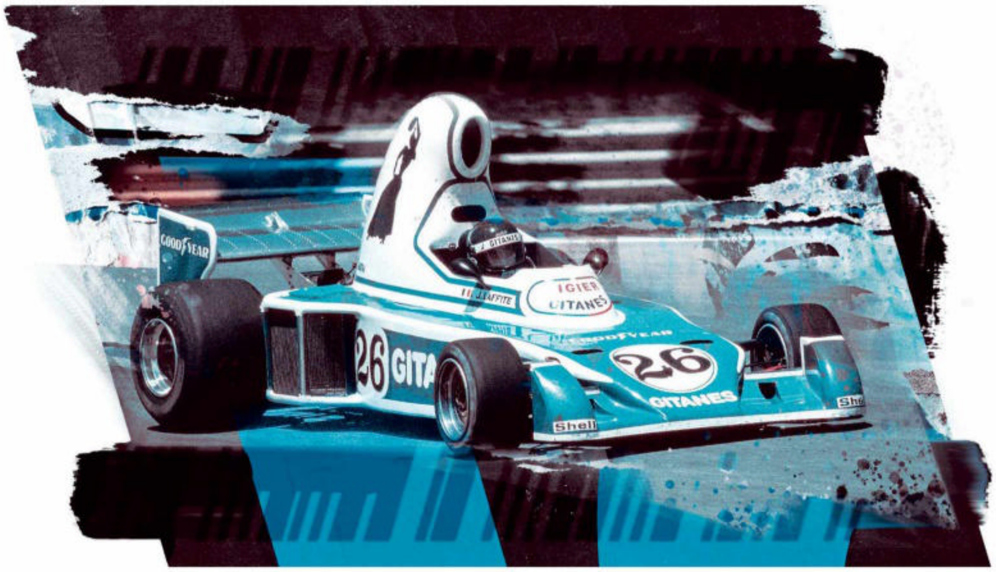
It is no surprise G-Shock has found a home within hip-hop. What started off in the 1980s as a virtually unbreakable tool watch has evolved into a canvas for individual style. Comes in countless different versions and Pharrell and Kanye – among others – are fans. £99.90; g-shock.co.uk

EPIC FAIL

The finest failures in automotive history

LIGIER JS5

WORDS: SAM PHILIP



The problem with F1 cars today is, they're so ugly. All those slats and fins and petrochemical sponsor logos: it's not like the good old days, when every Grand Prix racer was a sleek, sinuous slice of pure (tobacco branded) beauty.

Only, they weren't, were they? Sure, the good old days did contain some very pretty F1 cars – when *Epic Fail* is sad, *Epic Fail* spends a while looking at photos of the Lotus 72, which tends to help matters – but they also contained a whole bunch of utter horror shows.

Such as Ligier's JS5, the 1976 F1 entrant that sported an airbox so bulbous it was christened 'The Teapot'. Consider it an automotive Rorschach test: what do you see in that curvaceous funnel? Smurf hat? *Squid Game* guard? The exit hole of a marsupial?

Quite why the Ligier JS5's extraordinary protuberance was quite so extraordinarily protuberant remains unclear. Its primary purpose was to funnel cool air to the Ligier's 3.0-litre Matra V12, but other teams of the era achieved the same effect with airboxes that didn't look like haunted sculptures from an especially creepy kids' theme park.

The JS5 may have been ugly as a fungal toenail, but it wasn't slow. Though it retired early on its first two outings – perhaps out of sympathy for the eyes of onlookers – the Teapot then recorded a fourth place at Long Beach, California, in the hands of French racer Jacques Lafitte, who at least had the benefit of not having to look at the mega snout.

But a flower blooms only for a season. After just four races, as F1 tweaked the regulations to prevent any airbox extending beyond the roll hoop, the JS5 was revised to resemble a regular racecar. We have never witnessed the Teapot's like since, and for that we must all be thankful.

> **"The JS5 may have been ugly as a fungal toenail, but it wasn't slow"**

THRILLS WITHOUT THE BILLS

Fast(ish) cars you can actually afford

JEEP CHEROKEE (XJ)

What is it?	**Why are we interested?**	**So… it's the same but not?**	**Which one should I buy?**
If you're liking the look of the square bodied Land Cruiser 250, then how about the 1983–2001 Jeep Cherokee? Same look, different price.	*Because it's the same look and capability, but where the LC rocks in at £75k, you can pick up a decent XJ for about five.*	*Same idea, except the Jeep has a unibody with a boxed in frame. So it's more advanced. Technically.*	*It came with either a 4.0l straight six, or a 2.5l four pot turbodiesel. Use the saved cash on petrol goodness.*

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HELP!

The internet's most searched questions, rudely answered by us

THIS MONTH: **SUPERCARS**

1. How badly do supercars depreciate?

Unfair question. Supercars don't depreciate badly. They depreciate spectacularly well, with jaw dropping pace. A truly top tier supercar can blast from £250k to £80k in the time it takes its Lotto winning new owner to dent all four corners while driving it off the forecourt.

2. When were supercars invented?

In 1946, when Corporal Peter Supercar accidentally dropped a Crusader tank onto his Austin 10. Sadly Cpl Supercar never profited from his creation, having failed to patent it, and also having been thoroughly squashed by the Crusader tank.

3. Can doctors afford supercars?

Depends what kind of doctor. If it's a junior doctor in a British A&E department, then no. But if it's, say, Dr Oetker, the famed German food scientist behind the multibillion euro international cake company, then yes. Apart from the fact he died 100 years ago.

4. Can dentists afford supercars?

Really hung up on the 'which professions can afford supercars' thing, huh? We're guessing the reason you're asking this is because… your dentist recently started driving a supercar? In which case, time to ditch your dentist. That dude is charging too much for your scale 'n' polish.

5. Can pilots afford supercars?

OK, bored of these ones now.

6. Do supercar drivers get paid?

Yes. In special negative money, because they're big special important people.

7. Why don't the police use supercars?

Because their custodian helmets won't fit under the low roofline.

8. Are supercars difficult to drive fast?

Yes. Not because modern supercars are twitchy at the limit, but because generally speaking they're locked in humidity controlled garages in the vain hope that they won't depreciate catastrophically.

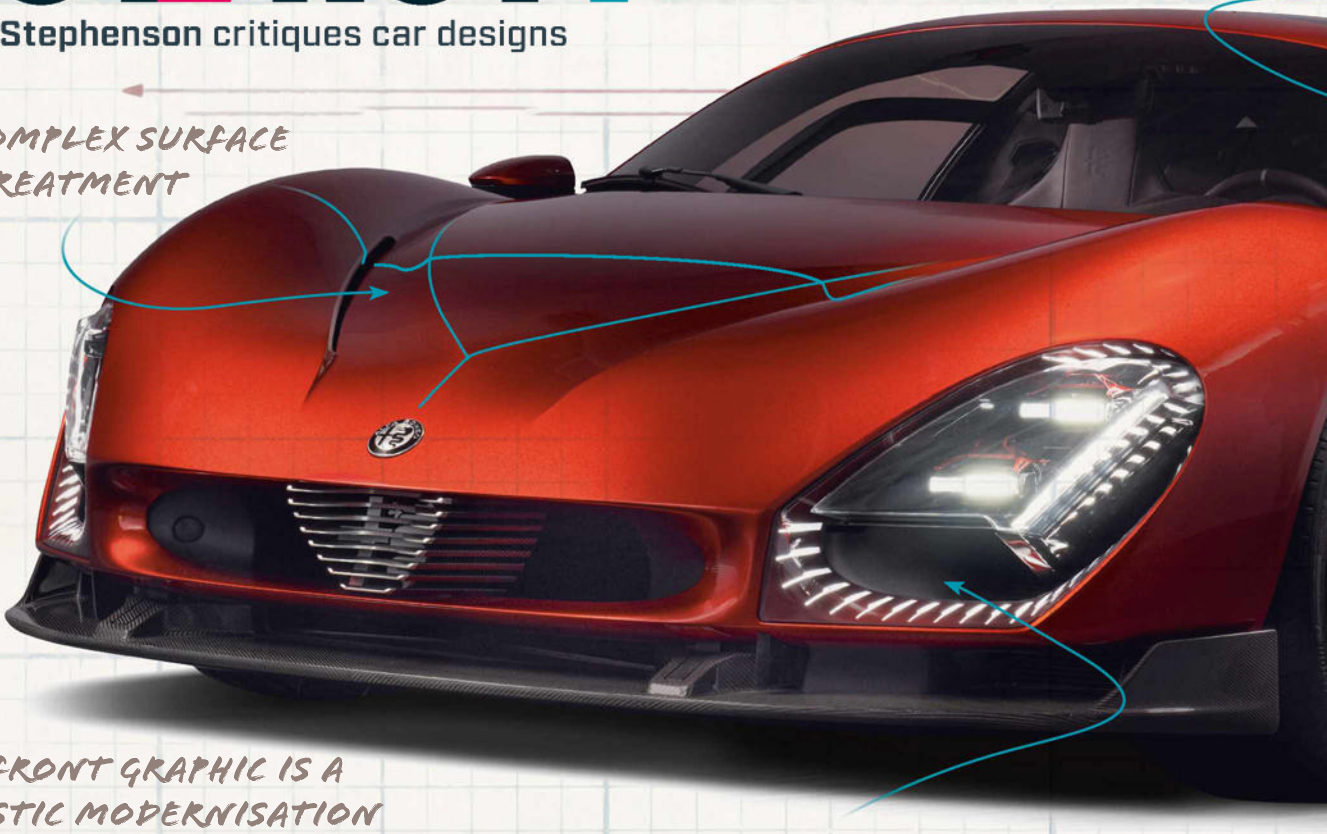
9. Why do supercars have low ground clearance?

It's popularly believed supercars sit close to the ground in order to lower their centre of gravity and also generate downforce. This is not the reason. It's because low ground clearance forces supercars to slow for urban speed bumps, thus allowing the driver to accelerate obnoxiously thereafter, thus alerting everyone within a 500 metre radius that there's a big special important person in the area.

IMAGE: MANUFACTURER, GETTY

HOT OR NOT?

Frank Stephenson critiques car designs

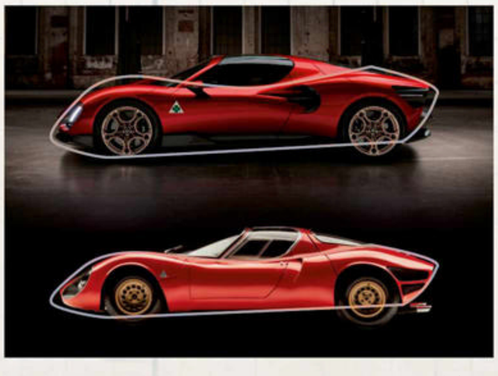


THINNER A-PILLAR TO REDUCE VISUAL WEIGHT?

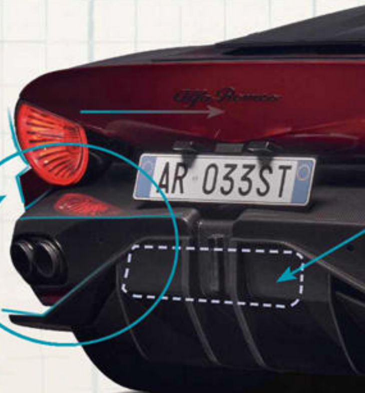
VERY COMPLEX SURFACE TREATMENT

THE FRONT GRAPHIC IS A FANTASTIC MODERNISATION OF THE ORIGINAL

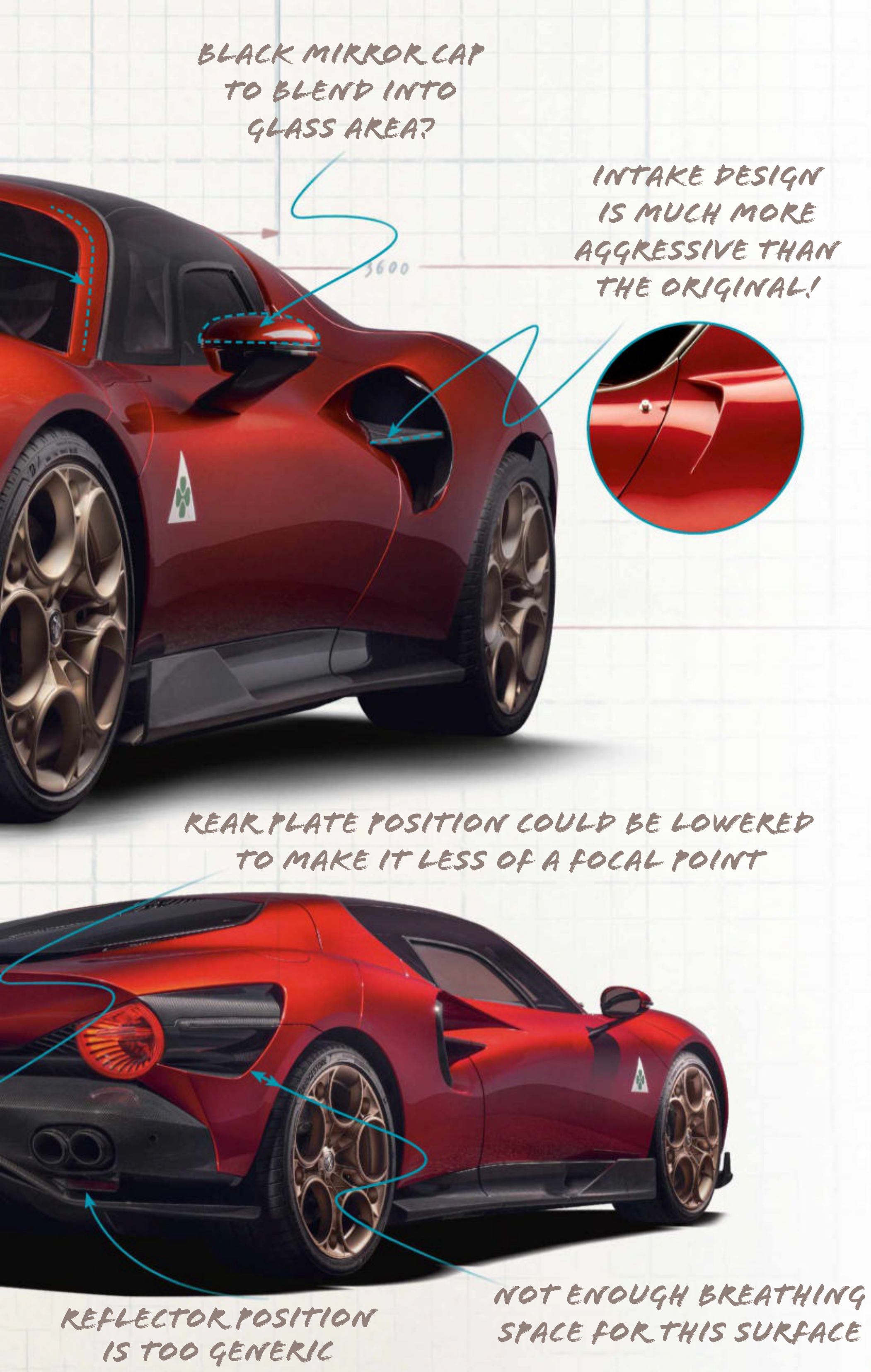
ROUNDER, MORE ORGANICALLY SHAPED HEADLIGHTS?



THE PROPORTIONS ARE NOT AS UNIQUE AS THE ORIGINAL 33. THE REAR IS MUCH HIGHER!



OVERCOMPLICATED DESIGN!


BLACK MIRROR CAP TO BLEND INTO GLASS AREA?
INTAKE DESIGN IS MUCH MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN THE ORIGINAL!
3600
REAR PLATE POSITION COULD BE LOWERED TO MAKE IT LESS OF A FOCAL POINT
REFLECTOR POSITION IS TOO GENERIC
NOT ENOUGH BREATHING SPACE FOR THIS SURFACE

Who is Frank?

A car designer with more hits than the Beatles – including the Escort RS Cossie, first BMW Mini, Maser MC12, numerous Ferraris and the McLaren P1. These days he runs his own consultancy – Frank Stephenson Design

Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale

IT TAKES A LOT OF COURAGE TO GO OUT and redesign a true icon of automotive design. The original 33 Stradale is widely considered the Mona Lisa, so any attempt to reinterpret the iconic shape into a modern package is no mean feat. But my goodness, the team at Alfa's Centro Stile have made a heck of a job of it. It's easily one of the most stunning releases of the past few years, but still not perfect.

I feel it misses the ultimate mark because of a few critical design choices. In some areas, the details appear overly complicated – the side intake, the edgy bonnet, the fussy rear end. The OG 33 is one of the most pure and simple forms in automotive history, an ode to beauty in its most stripped back form.

We're talking about a £1.7 million supercar here, so sadly only a select few will be able to buy one. But that's the beauty of good design, we all get to enjoy it so long as owners use them in the wild and don't lock them away forever. Room for improvement then, but still a smoking hot effort from Alfa.

VERDICT: HOT

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TOP 9

WACKY AUTOMOTIVE RACES

WORDS: GREG POTTS

PIG-N-FORD RACES

The annual Pig-N-Ford races take place at the Tillamook county fair in Oregon. There's a Le Mans style start with drivers running to pick up live pigs from the other side of the track. Carrying said pigs, they then start their Model Ts with a hand crank and complete three laps, stopping each lap to swap pigs

SKID PLATE RACING

Imagine a banger race on a tarmac oval where all of the cars are FWD and have metal plates welded under their rear wheels. We assume that was the elevator pitch for Skid Plate Racing, and it's just as entertaining as it sounds. Who said motorsport has to be fast? These things top out at around 35mph

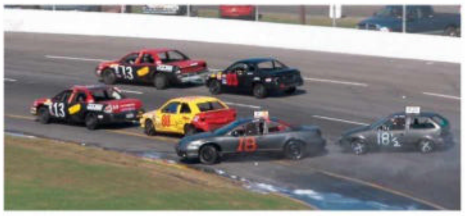


FIGURE EIGHT CHAIN RACE

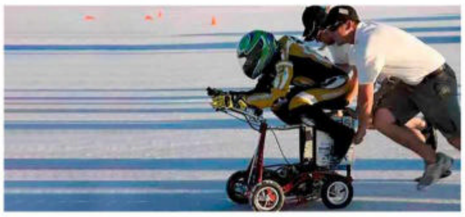
How do you make the US pastime of figure eight racing even more chaotic? Why, you chain two more cars to the back of yours, stick a second driver in the rearmost one and then pray you don't get T-boned crossing the track. You may recall Sabine Schmitz and Chris Harris having a go in S25 E1 of the TV show

TUKTUK TOURNAMENT

The TukTuk Tournament traverses Sri Lanka in a three-wheeled rickshaw. Teams take on a magical fantasy quest to slay dragons and find fake gems, all with the goal of being crowned champion while raising money for charity in the process. It's weird and we love it

EXTREME BARBIE JEEP RACING

Extreme Barbie Jeep Racing involves fully grown Americans racing downhill on dirt tracks while riding plastic Power Wheels cars designed for kids. Extra points for a unicorn liveried Jeep, we hope



BONNEVILLE BARSTOOL CLASS

The 'World of Speed' happens every year at Bonneville. It's not just 500+mph streamliners stretching for a top speed – there's also a class specifically for actual barstools fitted with 12V electric motors. The current record is 55.935mph

BLMRA 12 HOUR

No doubt you've heard of lawn mower racing, but are you aware of the jewel in the crown – the British Lawn Mower Racing Association 12 Hour? Yep, it's an endurance race for mowers. Heck, the first one in 1978 was won by Stirling Moss and five time Le Mans winner Derek Bell

NIFTY FIFTY ENDURANCE

Another uniquely British event, the Nifty Fifty is a five hour, off road endurance race for 50cc mopeds. Teams fit knobbly tyres to otherwise standard mopeds, before four riders take on the climbs and jumps of a motocross dirt track. Hope you like the sounds of teeny four strokes

DAF REVERSE RACING

Of course it was those zany Dutch who decided motor racing would be more exciting if everyone was driving backwards. This was made possible by the DAF 66's Variomatic CVT transmission, which allowed it to hit its top speed of over 70mph in reverse. Cars do get a little erm... unstable, though

PLAY

MIKE'S CHANNEL

Q: WHAT'S NEXT FOR *GRAND THEFT AUTO* ONLINE?

It's easy to forget that *Grand Theft Auto* is a game ostensibly about cars. That the 'auto' in the title is short for 'automobile', rather than 'automatic weaponry'. Or perhaps 'autopsy backlog'. Or even 'auto-erotic hand gesture'. I've seen that one a few times after losing a round of Team Deathmatch in *GTA Online*.

Back when the concept for the original *Grand Theft Auto* was percolating inside the massive brains of some 1990s video game developers, it had the extremely twee working title of *Race'n'Chase*, which suggested even greater emphasis on driving and less on unloading an entire magazine of ammunition on a group of mobsters. *Grand Theft Auto* these days is basically unrecognisable when compared to its humble automotive origins, telling sprawling, complex crime stories in an utterly convincing simulation of a North American metropolis, where even the flip flops accurately flip and flop like they're supposed to. That was some animator's job for a week.

This mutation only accelerated with the introduction of *GTA Online*, the enormously popular and thus lucrative multiplayer version of *GTA V*. Sure, Rockstar provided the broad structure of this online mode, but once players were let loose in the sandbox, it didn't take long before they were making their own fun.

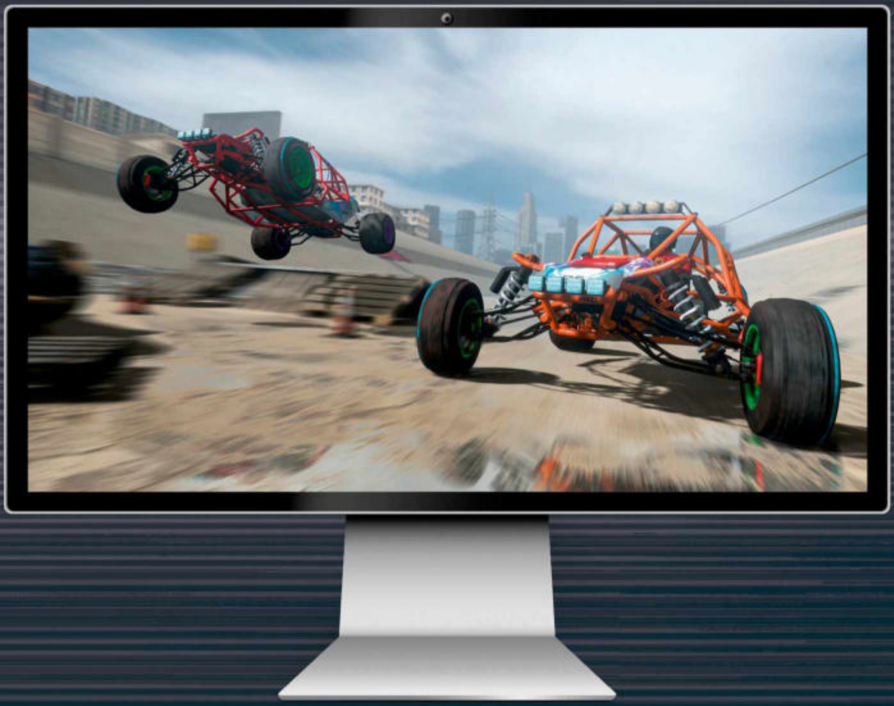
I was reminded of this while watching a documentary film called *Grand Theft Hamlet*, in which bored, out of work actors stuck at home during the pandemic decide to stage a performance of *Hamlet* inside *GTA Online*. If you've ever played *GTA Online* you'll have immediately identified the problem with that scheme: that you're likely to be interrupted, at any time, by a surprise airstrike from someone with a username that can't be repeated in a respectable publication like this one. I don't know much about Shakespeare, but I know Hamlet is supposed to die at the end, not halfway through from a hellfire missile attack. Still, the award winning film, shot entirely inside the game, is an uplifting way to spend an hour and a half.

Grand Theft Hamlet did get me thinking about what the *GTA 6* incarnation of *Online* might look like. There are zero concrete details, beyond assumptions the new Miami-inspired Vice City map will become a playable location in multiplayer. In the past couple of years, though, Rockstar has quietly invested in modding teams who have been instrumental in facilitating weird and wonderful new ways to play the game, such as 'roleplaying' servers where everyone plays a character rather than the usual enigmatic murderous psychopath. It suggests that while developers at Rockstar might have been as surprised as we were by how *GTA Online* has grown out of its petri dish, this time they'll be ready. If you're already struggling with fitting trivial things like work, family and exercise in around the important business of playing *GTA Online*, it's about to get a whole lot tougher...

Mike Channell is a TG writer, multimillion subscriber YouTuber and occasional racing driver. Not evidence of a strong work ethic, just an attention span obliterated by too many video games

ILLUSTRATION: WALTER NEWTON

GAME OF THE MONTH



EXOcars

£16, PlayStation, VR 2

The PlayStation VR2 was worth several hundred pounds just for the opportunity to press our faces up against those detailed *Gran Turismo 7* cockpits. Two years after the headset launched, though, you might reasonably expect another decent racer to arrive, and *EXOcars* is hoping to be it. As a budget priced game, *EXOcars* is as bareboned as the off-road buggies it features. There are a handful of tracks of wildly differing visual quality – 'Beacon' is a spectacular cliffside blast, while 'Forest' looks like a level ripped from the PlayStation 2 era. Fortunately the arcade handling is fundamentally satisfying, with even lift off oversteer convincingly modelled. It's good that the primary focus is on beating ghost times and multiplayer races because the AI drivers are thicker than your nan's custard. Also be warned, if you don't have a strong stomach for VR then after your first big roll you're likely to regret being born… **MC**

GEAR

SILVER CROSS X AUTOMOBILI LAMBORGHINI REEF AL ARANCIO

silvercrossus.com; $5,500

It turns out the Temerario won't be the new entry level Lambo. That will instead be this – the Reef AL Arancio. As part of a collab with Silver Cross, this is a limited edition pram that deploys Italian leather accents and "flashes of Lamborghini's signature orange hue". The old Lambo would have stuck a V12 in there too.

YARBO GARDEN ROBOT

yarbo.com; £4,799

Yarbo is a tiny tank tracked modular robot for your garden that can conduct a security patrol or tow up to 1,588kg with an autonomous follow mode. Plus, you can buy additional modules to turn it into a robot lawnmower, leaf blower or snow blower. And it'll even take itself back to its charging mat when the job is done, or its battery is low.

#libertywalk
Slammed

LIBERTY WALK X ORIGINAL KONBINI KEYBOARD

originalkonbini.com; $220

Liberty Walk is known for chopping and slamming supercars, and now it's turned its attention to… keyboards. Yes, this is an official Liberty Walk product and wears the same livery as the tuner's controversial widebody Ferrari F40. Milled from aircraft grade aluminium, it's limited to just 500 examples worldwide.

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BOV

JETHRO BOVINGDON

What is 'luxury' anyway? Jethro suggests it is... a Panda

We are obsessed with luxury. We crave luxury hotels with goose down pillows. If we're lucky perhaps we can splash out on a luxury watch. Our face wash is luxury. We can barely survive without quilted and luxurious toilet roll.

Car manufacturers are similarly afflicted. Many of them aren't car manufacturers at all, they say, but 'luxury brands'. A loose concept that nobody can really explain without descending into pretentious expressions that string together a load of alluring sounding words but don't actually mean anything. I've lost count of the number of presentations I've sat through telling me about target customers who all wear Gucci loafers and spend their days sipping cocktails while planning their next philanthropic endeavour.

Yet the sad reality is that car manufacturers are now ill equipped to provide luxury. No matter how deep the carpet, how rarefied the materials, how silent or powerful or sophisticated. The truly luxurious motoring experience is dead. It took me buying a £1,300 Fiat Panda with cloth trim and wind up rear windows to realise it.

No, I'm not going mad. Just think about what real luxury means. Time is luxury. All demands on you melting away is luxury. Simplicity and convenience are luxury. Think of it like that and new cars are infuriatingly awful. In many ways, the Panda is the most luxurious thing I've driven for a long time. The benefits of this humble little car were brought into sharp focus as I was simultaneously getting to know a new test car. A BMW that cost 50 times as much.

> "The sad reality is that car manufacturers are now ill equipped to provide luxury"

It starts with something as basic as the key. The Panda's is slender and small and is inserted into an ignition barrel, decluttering the interior. The BMW's is massive but has tiny, fiddly buttons (some on the side, one on the front). It rattles in the cupholder as you drive.

Jump into the Panda and within five seconds you can be driving. The BMW requires you to select a profile. You can move off in 'Guest' but then none of your preferred settings are loaded. So, I select 'Driver'. At which point it flashes a warning about this changing settings (the reason I'm doing it), and I have to then hit 'Activate'. There's a long delay while this new profile loads, during which I can't use the screen to turn up the heater, or enter something into the nav, or change the radio. The Panda is already down the road, of course.

Now I need to deselect the audible speed limit warning. Luckily this is done with the simple press of a button. But to disable the godawful lane departure warning system requires me to hit the main menu button on the touchscreen, scroll to drive settings and select (incredibly, this tile moves at random times), then find and deactivate the system, then confirm when it warns me I'm deactivating it. At which point it's possible that I've crashed but it is certain I will want to pull over and set the thing on fire.

This is not luxury. And these systems are the death of what cars represent: freedom and escape. The luxury of being the masters of our own destiny. The Panda treasures all those things and a strange peace washes over you as soon as you drop in and start to drive. No new car can match that feeling, whatever the price.

Host of TopGear America, Jethro has driven most things, mostly sideways, and forged a reputation as one of the world's most fearless road testers. Only one thing terrifies him – electric cars

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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-A. PLUMPTON, REVIEW 2024

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PINKS

NATALIE PINKHAM

If one man can change Aston's luck its Newey, says Natalie

Adrian Newey is not simply an engineer, he is the Michelangelo of car design. A sculptor shaping airflow into world championships. His designs have conquered the sport for decades, with Williams, McLaren and Red Bull all enjoying their golden eras under his guidance. His presence in a team is like having an ace up your sleeve. Aston Martin is an ambitious team with a billionaire's backing, a former world champion in Fernando Alonso and a hunger for glory. Has it just secured the one ingredient that could transform it from contender to champion?

I remember Miami 2024, when speculation was rife about where Adrian was going to go, having announced he would leave Red Bull after 19 years. Unlike many of the characters in the F1 paddock, Adrian shies away from media attention. His discomfort around the camera crews was palpable, but as we know F1 negotiations often play out in the public arena. I was having a quick one on one catch up with him when Lawrence Stroll swooped in, caught Adrian's eye, and with the hand gesture of an imaginary phone to his ear, mouthed "Call me". A camera behind him caught it all. It spread like wildfire that Adrian was joining Aston Martin. Smart move from Mr Stroll. Within a few weeks he had secured the most hotly contested signature in the sport.

> **"A camera behind him caught it all. It spread like wildfire that Adrian Newey was joining Aston Martin"**

But can one man really make the difference? Well yes, if that man is Adrian Newey. The psychological boost for a team that slipped five places from its 2023 standing to its 2024 finish is immeasurable. Talented staff fill the ranks at Aston Martin, but his signing is surely the shot in the arm Aston needs to reignite its challenge. Stroll's deep pockets, Alonso's ageless brilliance and the state of the art factory are all handy, but what Aston has arguably lacked until now, is a true technical visionary.

What makes Newey unique though isn't just his knowledge, it is his passion (regardless of the eye watering renumeration, rumoured to be £30 million a year). He is a racing romantic who still sketches car concepts by hand. He designs hypercars in his spare time and recently teamed up with my brother's architecture and construction startup, Shack, to design an affordable F1-inspired garage. How does the man find the time?

Aston Martin, as a brand, relies on its diehard fans, and Aston signing Adrian Newey is almost as strong a story for them as Ferrari bringing Lewis Hamilton into the fold. Will either partnership guarantee success? Nothing in Formula One ever does, but it signals that Aston isn't there to make up the numbers.

Natalie Pinkham is first and foremost a motorsport nut, but also a presenter for Sky Sports F1. Nobody knows more about the sport, or has better behind the scenes access to the paddock and drivers

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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W16

LAST

ONE

Bugatti's legendary 8.0-litre quad turbo W16 gets one last hurrah… under the skin of a lightweight track only multimillion pound hypercar. Who said anything about going quietly?

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

BLAST!

‘THE BOLIDE IS BUGATTI

BUGATTI
W16
Equipe Pur Sang
Asprey
TIDAL
JACOB&CO
CARBON
IXO

THE MOST EXTREME THERE'S EVER BEEN"

1

2

3

4

1 Mechanics standing around casually? That can only mean Ollie hasn't driven it yet 2 That's 1,578bhp at full charge. Imagine the noise. No, louder than that. Like the earth's splitting apart 3 Bolide has to use wheels compatible with LMDh spec tyres, so brake discs can only be 390mm. Make up for size with F1 materials 4 That's a 3D printed steering wheel and full race instrumentation. Small screens tricky to read when W16 is in full effect

The king of engines whoomphs into life.

Definitely whoomphs. It doesn't snarl or scream, it doesn't pepper the air with fake pops, there's just a sense of a lot of air being drawn in, and then suddenly combusted deep inside. Whoomph.

This is not a new noise. It's the sound Bugatti's W16 has always made and there's nothing else like it because no one else has ever had a W16. The king of engines doesn't need to be rowdy. It communicates in another way. It's the only engine I've come across that uses the ground underneath it as a resonating surface, sending vibrations far and wide, like how a croc ripples its back in the water. You'd probably read it as a warning not to mess, and that wouldn't be a bad interpretation. Even now it's unsilenced and decatalysed, it's not so much noise that it emits as presence.

The bodywork? That makes a tad more fuss. From the sinewy snout along the raked profile to the X-wing rear end, it exudes menace. A wheeled knuckle duster, the king of engines dressed as a street fighter.

The Bolide is the most extreme Bugatti there's ever been. It's more powerful than any racing car, has to shed more energy in the course of a lap, delivers 2,900kg of downforce, 2.5*g* of cornering force, explosive acceleration force – in short it's one of the most forceful cars there's ever been. And it is the last place a W16 engine will ever call home. Now 20 years old, we'll miss it when it's gone. Other hypercar engines rev higher, shriek louder. One or two produce more power, several are more power dense, all are smaller, lighter. But just as you don't doubt the lion's claim to be king, nor do you question the W16's. All others live in its shadow.

You'd imagine quite a lot has had to be done to the quad turbo 8.0-litre for this track only version, what with all the forces it's got to deal with. Nah. It's not the engine that's had to be changed. It's the car. Because Bugatti has done something remarkable here. It's built a car that can cope.

The engine itself is pretty much as it came out of a Chiron Super Sport. Same internals, same valvetrain, pistons and conrods, even the same oil and water pumps. But how do you take a 1,578bhp, 1,179lb ft powerplant, that together with its (only lightly modified) twin clutch transmission is a leviathan weighing some 700kg, and build a track car around it?

Well, you don't start with a Chiron. Dallara built Bugatti a bespoke carbon tub to Le Mans Hypercar regulations, and from there Bugatti set about creating a car that would showcase the engine in its purest form. Because that's what's going on here. This is not a track car that happens to be powered by a W16, it's a W16 given a new dimension on track. That's a small but important distinction.

I'm at Paul Ricard in the south of France. Tomorrow four owners are turning up to drive their new cars. Today is the training day for the instructors who will sit alongside them (no thanks) and Bugatti has found a small gap for me to drive it as well. It's a busy day. Some 40 people mill around. Big boss and CEO Mate Rimac is here, so too most of Bugatti's board of directors. I spend the morning in track briefings, filling out terrifying paperwork and watching the Bolide thunder around. Bugatti has laid on a pair of GT3 RSes as track learning cars. I'm watching them howl down the main straight when I sense another movement. The Bolide is storming out of the final corner. It devours the distance to the hard charging Porsches in great chunks, rips past them under the gantry. The speed differential is colossal, but more than that there's just this sense of immense pent up aggression being released.

I think about this an hour or so later as I'm strapped into the Bolide. It's tight in here, the wheel butting up close to the A-pillar, the view out blinkered by high front arches. The 3D printed steering yoke is reassuringly solid in my hands – just as well given how hard I'm clenching it. Raindrops have just started to pepper the windscreen. I'm on slicks. Andy Wallace has the good grace not to look remotely concerned as he straps in alongside me.

"Once you've got the pit speed on, just put the throttle wide open and hold it there."

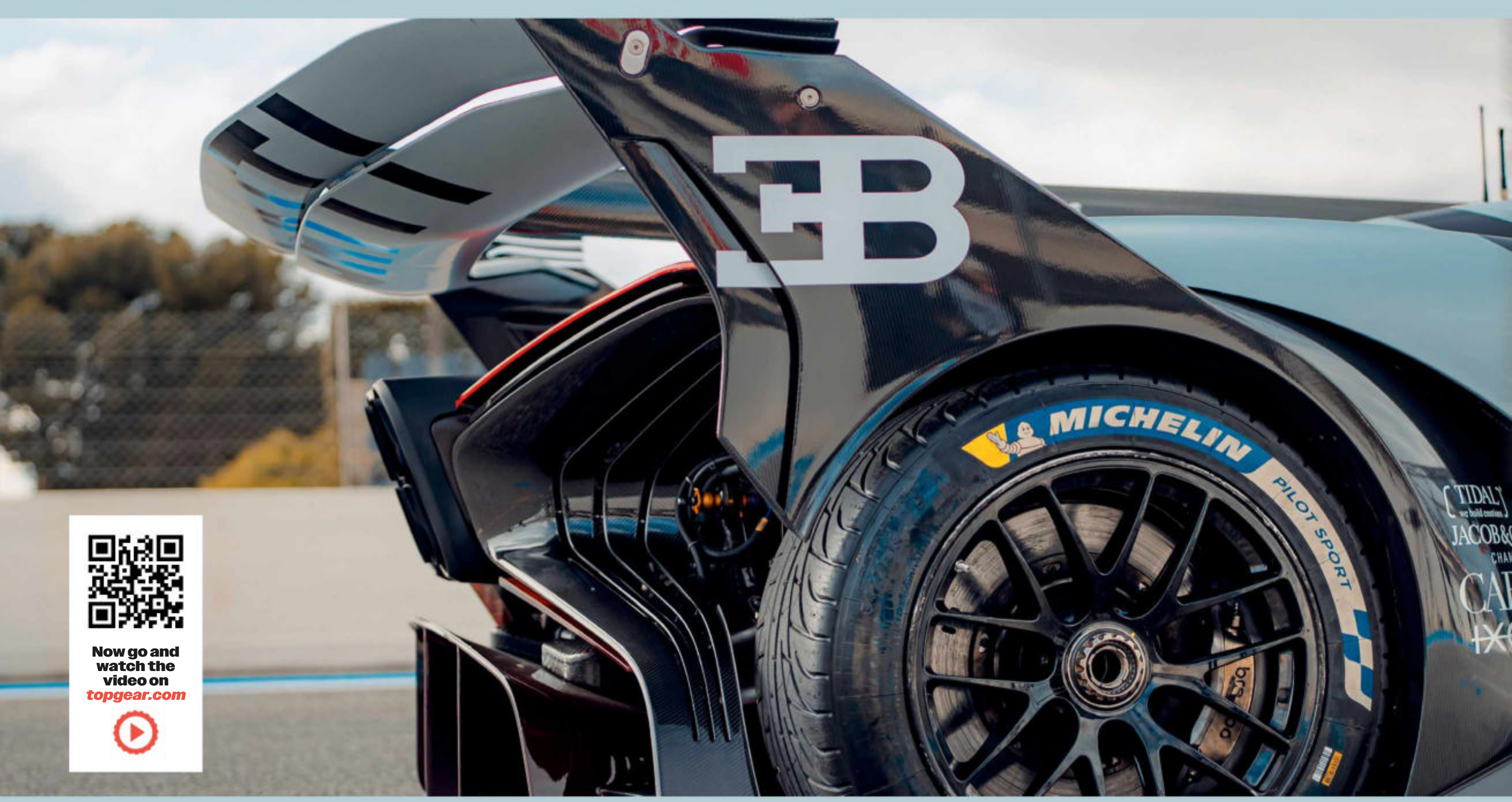
"In first gear?" I reply bemusedly.

"Yep, in first. And then at the end of the pitlane, knock the limiter off and hold on tight."

I point blank refuse. "No way. It'll spin all four wheels and I'll be straight into the barriers."

"Honestly. As long as it's got good tyre temperature, it'll hook up without a trace of wheel slip."

Whoomph. The king of engines fires. I immediately resolve not to do as I'm told, given the engine appears to be clawing its way through the bulkhead. The Bolide throbs and pulses with barely contained energy. I wincingly click the paddle for first gear, gingerly touch the throttle and


MICHELIN
PILOT SPORT
TIDAL
JACOB&CO

Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com*

BUGATTI
W16

"THIS IS A W16 GIVEN A NEW DIMENSION ON TRACK"

RADIO
ACK
ABS
FLASH
MRK
TC
ENGINE
DISP
PIT
LC
EMERGENCY
STOP

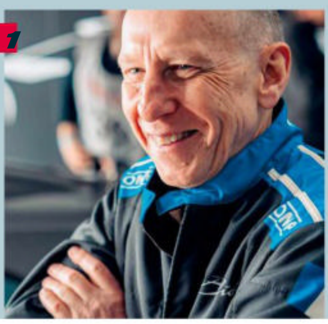
BUGATTI W16
Asprey

‘DESPITE THE W FRIENDLY, BENIGN

AY IT LOOKS, IT'S
, APPROACHABLE”

“I’M SWATTED DOWN THE TRACK LIKE A SUDDENLY FLATTENED FLY”

1



the Bolide crawls away, docile as anything. I pull second. Barely sense the shift. Chiron vibes.

And so, once clear of the pitlane, I nail it. My world erupts. Noise. Force. Power. All of it huge. It’s all consuming, a furious, unrelenting onslaught. I brake for the first corner. There’s little heat in the brakes so they surf on. Ooh gawd. Then I turn in and the Bolide starts to slide. Gulp. Don’t forget it’s damp, Marriage. It slides through turn three. And four. And five. Bloody hell.

But by the end of the lap I don’t want to park up, I just want more. Because the Bolide moves so well. Yes it slid, but a) that was entirely my fault for getting carried away on cold tyres and a damp track, b) it was caught masterfully by the life – and reputation – saving stability control, and c) the reason I was happy pushing immediately was that the Bolide felt calm in my hands, not snatchy, but progressive.

The handling takes its lead from the motor, which delivers its power with creamy smoothness across the whole rev range. There’s no top end crescendo, just this outrageous thrust everywhere, accompanied by monstrous bass roar. It’s not sharp and zingy, the king of engines likes the power to be poured on and kept on, not fiddled with mid corner.

And the dynamics are the same. When I speak to Mate Rimac afterwards he’ll tell me, “Ultimately it’s not about lap times in this car, it needs to be engaging for our customers to drive. And many of them are not racers.” He goes on to admit that some of them aren’t even likely to drive the car at all. I understand the ‘wheeled artwork’ argument sometimes, but not here, not with this.

So despite the way it looks, it’s friendly, benign, approachable. There’s nothing tricksy about it. The steering rack is fast but not Ferrari twitchy. There’s not much actual steering feedback but it’s positive and incisive into corners and there’s loads of feel through the seat. The chassis is a great communicator. Hadn’t expected that.

But the best bit happens after the apex. And it’s not just because you get to shovel air and 102 octane fuel into the power station. It’s how all four wheels deal with the resulting torque onslaught. Because the diffs are sensational at putting the power exactly where it’s needed to maximise traction without spoiling trajectory. It’s just wonderfully flattering, makes me feel like a hero as it exits slow corners with a whiff of four wheel drift.

The twin clutch box has new ratios and final drive, better suited to sprinting up to the 236mph max. Downforce at that speed hits 2,900kg. Once into sixth at, what, 170-odd mph, I notice the acceleration let up a fraction as drag takes effect. And then there are the brakes. Early suggestions of a 1,250kg kerbweight came to naught – the Bolide is probably around 1,625kg with fluids and me on board. Yet the power means it arrives into braking zones at outrageous speeds, a kinetic energy conundrum that Brembo has solved with 390mm carbon carbon brakes that apparently feature F1 materials. And ABS. A rare, perhaps unique, combo. They’re foolproof and the stopping power hangs me in the belts every time. Ever skydived? That breath crushing feeling when the parachute is yanked? It’s that. Every corner. Mega pedal feel – I see operating temperatures up over 800ºC and those outside get glowing discs.

If there’s an issue here it’s the load all of this places on the tyres. Due to high speed aero load, Michelin insists on high pressures – around 35–38psi. They’re fine there, but Wallace says grip drops away significantly when they go above that.

The long and the short of all this is that the Bolide is very harmonious. The king of engines has been matched in braking power, lateral grip, and yes, traction. On my last lap I slow down on the back straight and engage the pit limiter. It sits smoothly at 40mph in first gear and I hold it there for five seconds to let the four turbos pressurise. And then I thumb the little black button on the steering wheel to cut loose the king of engines and I’m swatted down the track like a suddenly flattened fly. I hoot with laughter, while blown away that the slicks can cope with every single one of the 1,600-odd horses without so much as a chirrup. Andy reckons it’s even more vivid than launch control from a standstill. I can believe him.

Like I said, the Bolide feels very together, each component balanced against the others. I remember thinking the same after I drove another track only hypercar – McLaren’s P1 GTR. The whole car is calm under pressure – and more than that it *feels* like a Bugatti. When I track down Mate afterwards he tells me “the hardest thing for this project was to make it a Bugatti in terms of detail and quality. Racecars are fascinating things, but they’re not Bugattis.” I’d expected to find the Bolide a racecar with a W16 shoved in. With only 40 being built I thought it would be heavily compromised, a bit of a Frankenstein’s monster.

But as Mate said, if that were the case, it wouldn’t be a Bugatti. Instead the Bolide seems to have been as rigorously developed as a Chiron by people with a very clear idea of who it’s for and what it needs to do. Ballistically fast, yes, but also polished and flattering, which gives the driver the mental capacity to enjoy and appreciate the Bolide’s centrepiece, the 16 pulsating pistons and conrods, four turbos and 64 valves that make up the world’s one and only W16 engine. The king of engines.

W16

1 When Le Mans winner Andy Wallace tells you the Bolide is the fastest accelerating car he's driven, you pay attention 2 Snug in here. Seats are part of the monocoque, wheel and pedals slide to suit 3 Bolide in its natural habitat: in a dark room, where its driver is having a lie down 4 Wouldn't know it to look at his face here, but Ollie actually had to give up his weekend to drive this. Poor guy

2

3

4

EMERGENCY
STOP
FIRE
E.

“I’ll do a proper, proper E30 restomod, with a V10. Not just the technical stuff, but also design. I don’t know when I will get round to that - it might be my retirement project”

Mate Rimac is a man on a mission. What next for Bugatti?

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARC RICCIONI

It's a cold day at Paul Ricard. Wrapped in a bomber jacket Mate Rimac is standing on the pitwall, pointing his phone at the Bolide as it comes ripping past at full noise. He grins and looks over, "Pretty cool, huh?"

Rimac could have pulled the plug on the Bolide project when he took control of Bugatti three and a half years ago. But he was never going to, was he? He's a car guy. He's on the pitwall with his phone, filming for posterity because his wife is out there in the passenger seat.

Rimac, by the way, has yet to drive a Bolide. Given his reputation, his love of driving and drifting, the fact that his dream one day is to do "a proper, proper E30 restomod, with a V10. Not just the technical stuff, but also design. I don't know when I will get round to that – it might be my retirement project", why hasn't he got into the Bolide yet?

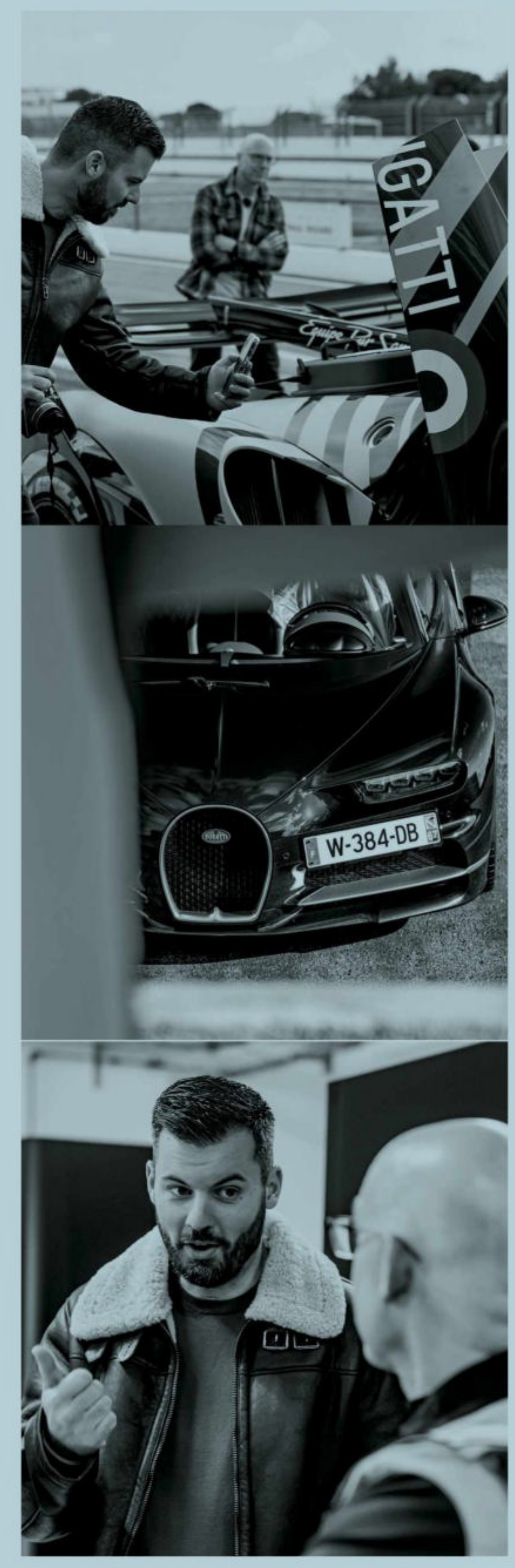
"I'm always super detailed about testing and driving cars, about every detail, and when I drive our cars I come back with a long list of things I want improved or changed. But with this car it's just so far outside my level of competence. It's a racecar, a track car and I'm a road car user. I can't come anywhere near what this car can do."

That's fair enough, it's not like he's short of work elsewhere. He now has three projects, of which Bugatti is only half of one strand – that's the Bugatti-Rimac car division. Then there's Rimac Technology providing solutions to other car companies, and last year he launched Verne, a robotaxi company. "We showed it in June last year, a few months before Tesla showed theirs – and just three weeks after we introduced the Tourbillon.

"Last June," he admits, "almost killed me." Two weeks ago he was at Nardò driving the Chiron-replacing Tourbillon. He pulls out his phone and shows me a video clip, "Look how fast it revs, that noise. I was blown away by how good the car is. I'm so, so proud of it. You are in this car, you have this steering wheel with a fixed hub, you have analogue instruments, you have the performance of 800 electric horsepower with 1,000 combustion horsepower. There is nothing like it.

"And you don't need the engine to accelerate fast. That's the advantage. In the Tourbillon if you're lazy and don't want to shift down, or just wanna go ahead, there's so much electric power that you don't have to. Like why else carry around all that weight and complexity?" He has a small dig at other hybrid supercars. "I have driven them all and I don't get it really. Why would you have a hybrid powertrain with a turbo engine? Like, a turbo engine is a compromise on its own, right? By going from turbo to naturally aspirated we lost 600bhp. I knew we could more than make up for it with the electric powertrain. So the electric powertrain enabled the cool combustion engine. In the Tourbillon, you have 70km of all electric range while others in electric mode are super limited."

Development is progressing well. In total Bugatti is building 35 prototypes before the first customer cars. "We are basically done with the development and now we do the homologation and testing." He continues, "The goal is to be lighter than Chiron. It'll be the first hybrid that's lighter than its combustion only variant. We have a big battery – 25kWh – we have three electric motors and we are lighter. Just one example, the suspension is 45 per cent lighter compared with the Chiron


GATTI
W-384-DB

When Mate said he'd make a flying visit, we didn't expect him to actually dress like Biggles

because of 3D printing." There is, by the way, some carry over from Chiron to Tourbillon… "We have decided to take over one part, which is the switch for the interior lights."

First Tourbillon deliveries are scheduled for 2026, built at Molsheim in a new building alongside the existing factory, known as the Atelier. Hard though it is to believe, Molsheim will have its busiest year ever in 2025, building the remaining Bolides (14 have been delivered so far), plus the 99 Mistrals. Then 250 Tourbillon coupes will be next, and after that a roadster? "You can assume," Mate comments with a smile, "but also there are many things you can do with this hybrid powertrain. You can make a version without hybrid, or with it minimised, or without the [driven] front axle, whatever."

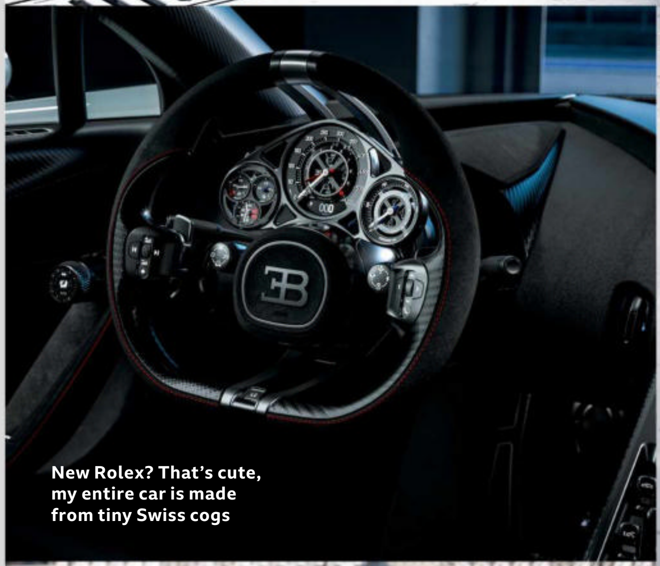
Would he do a non-hybrid Tourbillon? "Uh, well, it's pretty difficult because the starter is the hybrid motor. So you don't have belt drive. You don't have an alternator, you don't have an air conditioning compressor, but you could do a very reduced system." Beyond that Rimac won't be drawn on future product. But it's widely rumoured he wants Bugatti to have a second model line. That's nothing new. When we interviewed previous boss Stephan Winkelmann back in 2019, he said the same.

But with Rimac at the helm, how about a four door with the V16 in the front? Something that could recreate the appeal of the iconic Royale from 1927, which celebrates its centenary two years from now. And was powered by a straight eight… which is basically half a V16. As yet, no comment.

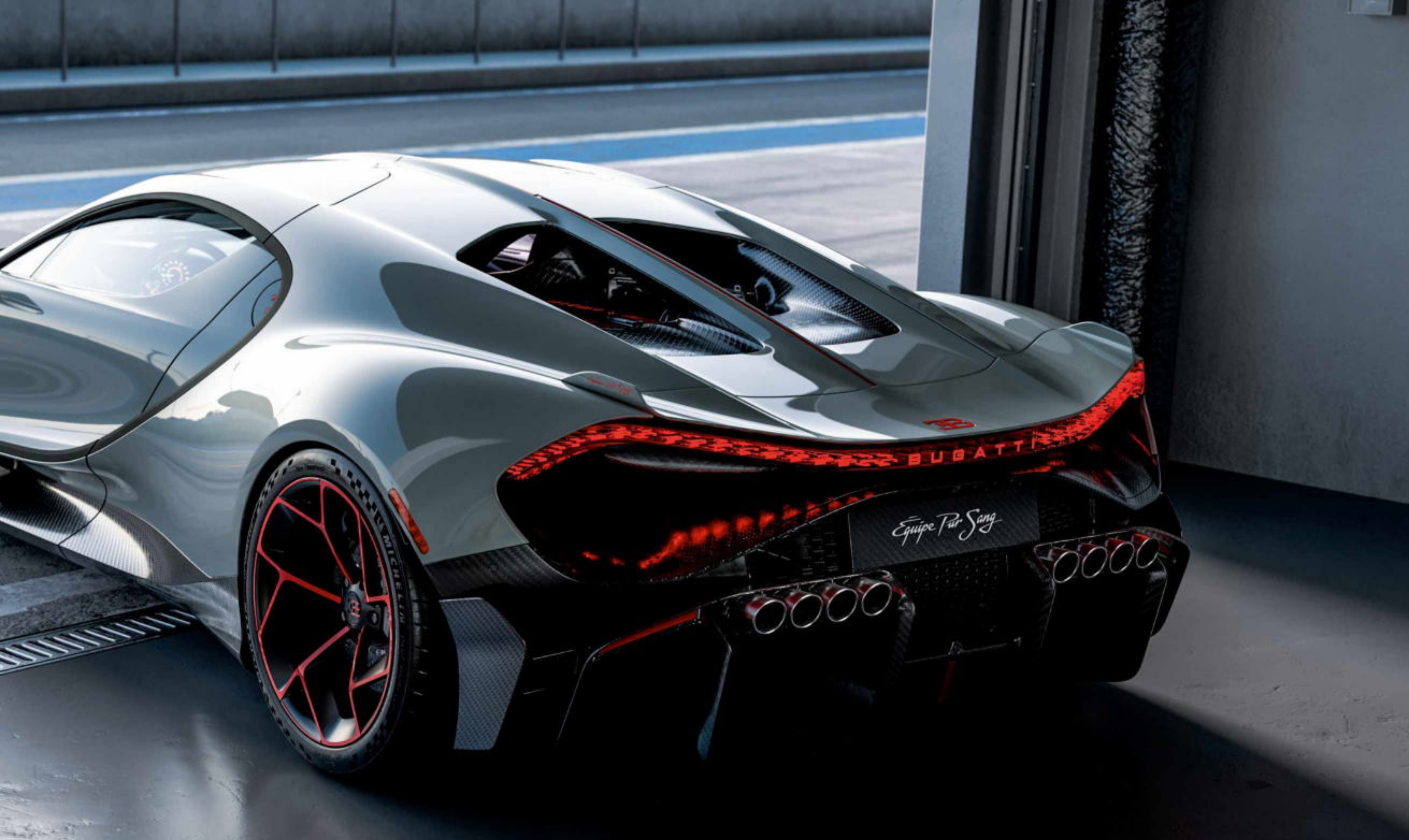
It's noisy in the pit garages, with the Bolide thundering in and out and the rattle of wheel guns, so we walk over to the foyer where Bugatti has positioned a Type 35. Does it give him a sense of legacy when he sees cars like this? "It's really important. It makes me think about some of the small things, like what Ettore said, 'if it's comparable it's no longer a Bugatti', or when Piëch described the Veyron by saying 'it's a car to do over 400kph and the same day go with your wife to the opera'. It's just a few words, but there's so much depth and meaning [to those phrases]. We repeat that often to the engineers, telling them this car will still be driving around in a hundred years. How do you make sure this seal will last 50–60 years, how do we make sure these electronics can be serviced in 50, 60 years?

"I won't say much because we haven't decided yet, but I think warranties for these kind of cars need to be very different. I'll give an example. So Chiron is now four years carefree warranty with service included and that's pretty good. Why are people not using the Veyron so much? They would use it more if the tyres and wheels weren't so expensive, so we are trying to make a new set of wheels and tyres. Look at the LaFerrari and P1 and 918, people get a bad battery and it costs hundreds of thousands to replace. We want to make sure this is never the case with Tourbillon. A Bugatti has to be super reliable and worry free, because that also ensures resale value."

I ask Rimac about future developments – where does he reckon we are with solid state batteries for instance? "I feel like a fossil in this industry although I'm just 37. But I've



New Rolex? That's cute, my entire car is made from tiny Swiss cogs



PIPE DREAM

Struggling to make your Tourbillon spec stand out? Bugatti has just the thing

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE

Were we nervous when Mate Rimac took control of Bugatti back in late 2021? No, because we knew that above all else, Mate was a car guy. He may have made his name with electrical engineering, but the Tourbillon is evidence of his passion for mechanical engineering. Petrol, as well as the odd electron, courses through his veins.

Take the latest Tourbillon option announcement. Équipe Pur Sang is a pack likely to cost around €240,000. It features a reprofiled front splitter, little fins on the rear wing, an altered diffuser, different wheels, carbon engine cover inlays, plus a few other little trinkets such as embroidery on the dash and headrests and an upgraded performance seat. But mainly the small matter of eight exhaust pipes.

Eight exhausts. It's such a childish thing to get excited about. They might well just be tips for all we know at the moment, replacing the standard Tourbillon's two flat openings, but they give the car a hint of Hot Wheels as well as drawing a neat interpretation line back to the V16 engine buried deeper inside. They're a visual hat tip, and a humorous one at that.

We can assume that Mate either had the idea himself or knew a great idea when it was presented to him. For all its speed and prowess, if you think back Bugatti has occasionally seemed a little fusty over the years. And when the Tourbillon arrived, there were those of us who were slightly disappointed by its familiar, dare we say derivative, looks. This tail end exhaust barrage is evidence of how things have shifted under Rimac's leadership. This is now a company with a more lighthearted touch. And as a result of this, the Tourbillon feels fresher, more fun.

And far from being an odd juxtaposition, for us that sits well alongside the cabin's artistry, the mechanical dials and intricate pop up screen. Subtle though this may be, those eight exhausts are signs of a small, but important change of direction at Bugatti under Rimac's guiding hand.

"DO I NEED TO SEND ROCKETS TO SPACE? NO. THIS IS ALREADY ENOUGH"

BOUTIQUE
OFFICIELLE
23 AAW

Mate Rimac standing next to a Type 37 or a Farrow & Ball colour chart? You decide!

been making batteries for 16 years and I've been reading about solid state and breakthroughs in the fundamental technology for 16 years, and it always seems like it's just there, but it's not. What has happened is the price [of conventional batteries] has come down 90 per cent – it used to be €1,500 per kWh, now it's like €100 per kWh."

Elon Musk then. Hero or villain? "So for me, before this whole thing with the elections and all that stuff, he was the most exciting person in the world. I mean, sending reusable rockets into space, preparing to launch rockets to Mars, send people to Mars. I know how the [auto] industry works and how much Tesla has driven the change in all of these car companies. And I know that the only difference between Tesla and all of the other car companies is just Elon, nothing else. He has really changed the world, really had a huge impact."

And is China a threat or an opportunity? "Europeans have been shipping cars there and producing cars there for decades and shipping, like, containers of money out, so it seems a bit hypocritical now the Chinese want to do the same here. If they can offer a better product at a more competitive price, why wouldn't they? They seem to have good products and the growth trajectory is crazy. Look where they've come in 10, 15 years."

What's the plan for Verne? "You will have two battlefields for self driving, which is the US and China, and Verne is mainly focused on Europe. We're not selling the car, it's like a service. We come to a city, we come with hundreds or thousands of cars and we offer a service to... people who just don't give a damn about cars. They just want to get from point A to point B and don't want to own a two tonne piece of machinery that you have to service more often than you go to the doctor, spend months learning to drive, clean and take care of and so on. It's just not the most efficient way."

What's holding back self driving cars? Is it a legislation problem? "No. Well, actually yes, but that's not the one blocking it. It's a technology problem. It's difficult to solve the one per cent of issues. We have been driving around cities testing for a couple of years and for the majority of time everything is fine, but then you have a surprising situation where the car doesn't know what to do. And then you have to intervene. So you need to resolve this one per cent of situations. But I think with improvements in AI, it is coming. And it will have a major impact."

Mate shakes his head and sighs deeply. "I don't have megalomaniac ambitions. Really. I just love what I do. Do I need to send rockets to space? No. This is already enough. It's a little bit of craziness that I have, when you look at where I came from to where I am now, it's like a big, big gap. But, you know, we are still this little company and we try to go against people like Google and Tesla when it comes to self driving and so on. I guess we have to be a bit crazy to do it."

CHIRON
VEYRON
BUGATTI
MICHELIN
BUGATTI
Ettore Bugatti

TG's rough guide to BUGATTI

Everything worth knowing about the world's fastest car company

THE EVOLUTION OF SPEED

Every Bugatti model that matters

WORDS OLLIE KEW

TYPE 35

The touchstone for all modern Bugattis, the Type 35 of the 1920s won over 1,000 races in its competitive life. Not bad for a car with (at its most powerful) 138 horsepower

TYPE 41 ROYALE

Over six metres long, three tonnes in weight and powered by a 12.7-litre inline eight that Bugatti put in a high speed train. Possibly the ultimate luxury statement. And a complete commercial flop

MODEL 100

Could this be the prettiest aircraft of all time? Designed to win speed trials in the late 1930s, the contra-rotating props lightweight never flew in period because of World War Two

EB110

The only product of Bugatti's mid-1990s revival celebrated the 110th anniversary of Ettore Bugatti's birth with a quad turbo AWD V12 supercar… just in time for a global recession

EB 18/3 CHIRON CONCEPT

Before the Veyron came the… huh? Yep, this 1999 concept car previewed Volkswagen-led Bugatti's future with a 6.3-litre W18 engine good for a mere 555bhp. Took six years to evolve into…

VEYRON 16.4

… this. VW boss Ferdinand Piëch's dream of a 400kph, 1,000 horsepower car was finally realised. And the company only had to make a loss in the region of €4m on every one sold to achieve it

VEYRON SUPER SPORT

You didn't expect Volkswagen to stop at a mere 1,000PS (986bhp), did you? New turbos, suspension, aero and tyres later, the SS managed a record breaking 268mph vmax on the VW test track

CHIRON

Veyron successor continued the quad turbo W16 recipe, now up to 1,479bhp with Le Mans racer levels of chassis stiffness, a limited top speed of 261mph and a £1.8m price

DIVO

Can a two tonne Fabergé egg moon rocket be a hardcore track special? With Bugatti now under the stewardship of spinoff specialist Stephan Winkelmann, *oui*, for sure

CHIRON SUPER SPORT

Longtail Chiron packing a beastly 1,578bhp engine tune was the first factory road car to breach the 300mph barrier in history. And it was still accelerating

MISTRAL

One more trophy for the quad turbo W16 engine. The roofless Mistral (named after southerly French breeze) took the cabriolet speed record with a 282mph run in late 2024. Roll on the Tourbillon

TOURBILLON

The first Rimac tech-infused Bugatti teams a tilted Cosworth V16 with three e-motors for 1,775bhp. Intricate aero and horology-tastic cabin seal the deal, this is the next all time great hypercar in waiting

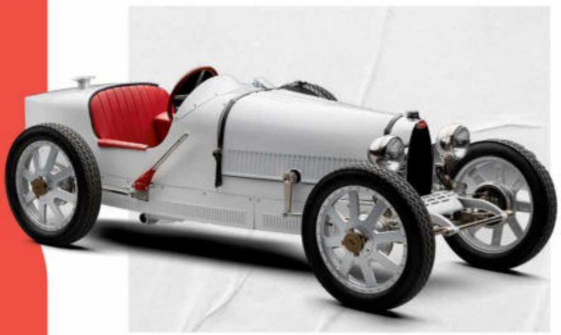
Our top three

CHIRON SUPER SPORT [2019]

The 'production' version of the 300+ Edition that bludgeoned its way to the current vmax record, the ultimate Chiron is the apex of the roadgoing W16 story – and thanks to that longtail and malevolent face, the best looking modern Bugatti to date

TYPE 57 SC ATLANTIC [1937]

One of the most exotic cars of all time: a streamlined pre-war unicorn of which only four were made. If the mysterious lost example was found intact in a barn tomorrow, experts reckon its value would top $100m



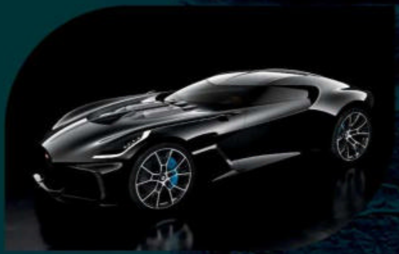
BUGATTI BABY II [2019]

Not all Bugattis cost millions. Bicester-based Little Car Company's modern miniature electric recreation of Ettore's shrunken Type 35 toy is available in handbeaten aluminium or carbon finishes for a mere £55k

The Lost Toys

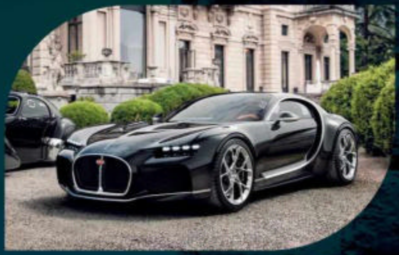
Bugatti has to spend its chips wisely – here are three cars that never came to fruition

WORDS JACK RIX



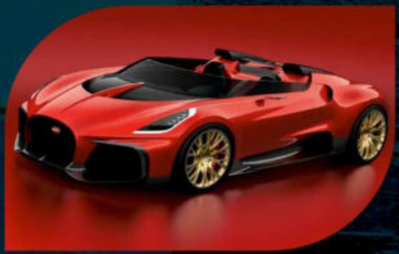
The Rembrandt

A GT with the W16 stuffed up front. Quite a few visual similarities to one-off La Voiture Noir. This with a V16 in the nose? Yes please



The Atlantic

Based on the Taycan platform, but with a petrol-electric powertrain. A modern take on the 1936 Type 57 Atlantic with a clamshell boot and butterfly doors



The Veyron Barchetta

This 2008 concept, based on the Veyron 16.4 Grand Sport, predated the flurry of speedsters from Ferrari (Monza), McLaren (Elva) and Aston (Speedster)

8

Litres, four turbos and 16 cylinders make up Bugatti's W16 engine

3,712

Parts used in assembling each W16 powertrain. Every one is hand built

12

Seconds it'd take the Veyron's coolant pump to fill your average bathtub

0.6g

Deceleration force from the Veyron's air brake. Tilts to 55° in 0.4secs when brake pedal applied

9

Minutes it takes to drain the Chiron's fuel tank at vmax. Three secs quicker than the Veyron

60,000 litres

Volume of air the Chiron guzzles per minute flat out, as much as we breathe in five days

304.77 mph

Recorded speed set by Andy Wallace in the Chiron Super Sport 300+

136 metres per second

Ground the Chiron covered at full whack during its record run

£1,217.99
£1,217.99
£1,217.99
£1,217.99

Price of a single Chiron rear tyre from your local Halfords. Plus fitting

256

Number of bargain priced pedigree racehorses you could buy for the £3.8m Tourbillon

1,775 bhp

Total output of the Tourbillon: 986bhp from the engine, 789bhp from the three e-motors

9,000 rpm

8.3-litre nat-asp V16 sits at the heart of the Tourbillon. Ear defenders on

1,450 kg

Dry weight of the Bolide. Powerplant weighs 700kg alone

2.5g

Lateral force the Bolide generates when cornering. Enough to make you dizzy

2,900 kg

Total downforce the Bolide produces at its 236mph vmax

81
81
81

Bugatti's record number of deliveries in a year, set in 2023

€500K
€500K

Approximate amount the average Bugatti buyer spends on options

159g

Weight of Bugatti's oval emblem. Each takes 10 hours and 20 people to create

2

Victories in the Le Mans 24-Hour Race, back in 1937 and 1939

1

Winner of *TopGear*'s Car of the Year award, in 2005. Shared with the Toyota Aygo

Bugatti in numbers

The facts and figures that make our heads spin

WORDS PETER RAWLINS

VMAX MEMORIES

Jack Rix

RAIN OF TERROR

We had 24 hours with a Chiron Super Sport – what would you have done? If your answer is drive at over 200mph on the autobahn and then join a public session at the Nürburgring then great minds think alike. The only spanner in our plan was the sheet rain falling when we arrived at the circuit. I decided to go out in the car anyway with a very wide eyed Andy Wallace riding shotgun – especially when we snapped sideways and the windows filled with Armco. We managed to stay on the tarmac, barely, and with refrigerated tyres we struggled to keep pace with the diesel BMW 3-Series Compact in front. Head over to the *TopGear* YouTube channel and you can watch the whole ordeal in glorious 4K.

Ollie Kew

ROCKET MAN

I'm a long way from being a racing driver. But how's this for a list of racing driver excuses? On the day life presented me with the chance to hit 250mph in a Chiron, it was too hot and humid for the W16 to make max power. The US spec petrol was low on octane, the wind was gusting on an active military runway (NASA's Cape Canaveral) that could be closed at any moment. Several runs were postponed. The engine baked in the summer heat. Time at the location was ultra tight. It came down to one attempt, one run, no second chances... and the Super Sport went and did it. A GPS verified 250mph, in worst case scenario conditions, with a petrified driver. That's how easily a Bugatti hits record speeds.

Ollie Marriage

WARPED SPEED

I'd been going to Bruntingthorpe for years. A solid two miles of cold war runway that knew its time was up. Crumbling surface, weeds on the fringes, broken bits of aeroplane in the bushes. And yet somehow, the best place in the UK to go fast. But not 200mph fast. I'd wrung stuff out there so many times, had cars tapping the 155mph limiter, once had a TVR Tuscan off the dial at 210mph, only for the GPS trace to reveal the truth – 178mph. And then I sent a Veyron down its crusted runway. I remember the sense of rumbling power, the sheer force that kept building and building, and glancing down to see the needle sweep innocuously past 200mph barely beyond the halfway point.

Tom Ford

EAGER TO POLICE

A story well told by now, but a few years ago, I was tasked with picking up the Bugatti Veyron world record car from the factory and driving it across and down the Stelvio Pass. Tough job and all that. But it wasn't the autobahn-in-a-Veyron that turned out to be the focus, even though that's another story entirely. It was the ride I gave to the local Italian *carabinieri* who'd organised the road closures for *TG*. The back side of the Stelvio Pass is much more open and we only went for a quick 15 minute blast – but when we got back, the cop got out of the car, kissed the ground and cried. Loudly. We'd been down the – closed – single track road a little too fast for his constitution, apparently.

Jason Barlow

BLADE RUNNER

The launch of the Bugatti Veyron was *the* hot ticket of 2005. Dogged by developmental issues and behind schedule, there were murmurings perhaps it was simply never going to happen. But here it was, at last. I covered it, and recall one of my colleagues – a well known figure in the car mag world and an awesome driver – being uncharacteristically nervous as we boarded the helicopter that was taking us from Palermo to the venue, a medieval winery near Madonie. He was right to be – we landed safely but on the next flight the pilot misjudged things and the tail rotor clipped a concrete outbuilding. Fortunately no one was hurt. And the car? Well it didn't miss a beat. The drama, it turned out, was elsewhere...

DRESS FOR VITESSE

WORDS SAM BURNETT

How to get that Bugatti owner look

Chinos are a must for any self respecting loaded hypercar driver – we say Gucci all the way, where you can get yourself some cotton twill trousers at a bargain £800

A supple **driving shoe** is important – for walking to the car, the computers take care of driving. What about YSL loafers in slippery eel (no socks required) at £865?

Some might say that the Jacob and Co Twin Turbo Furious Bugatti is a hideous **watch**, but it's hideously *expensive* at £405,000 and that is of course the main thing

Bugattis are a little bit pokey, so budget another £150k or so for a **Range Rover** to carry your stuff – spare eel shoes, shopping, kids, that sort of thing

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Bugatti
THE MOVIE

B movie

Five things we want to see from the forthcoming Bugatti biopic

WORDS SAM BURNETT

1 Star power

From what we know so far, the Bugatti biopic will be filmed in English with an international cast. Sounds great – actors with authentic foreign accents are much cheaper. But the film could do with one proper A-lister and Tom Cruise is looking for some post-*Mission Impossible* gigs…

2 Authentic drama

There's no need to ham any of the Bugatti story up, it's plenty dramatic already – and actually quite tragic if you stop with Ettore Bugatti's death in Paris in 1947 with the company in tatters (the French seized the factory after WW2). Still, the subsequent revivals offer a bit of sequel bait

3 Fun history

Bugatti started in Germany, but France took over Alsace in 1919. It was in Germany in 1940 and France in 1945, but the factory wasn't released back to Bugatti until 1947. In the film we'll find out Bugattis are so pricey because they keep having to change the stationery

4 Lots of driving

Forget things like character development, dialogue and plot, we want to see lots of gratuitous pictures of Bugattis being driven about the place. Extended racing sequences would be nice too, including the 1937 Le Mans race – forget Ford vs Ferrari, Bugatti vs Delahaye is it

5 No songs please

Not everything needs to be a musical, can we just have this one thing for us? No impromptu dance numbers, no bursting into song in the middle of a bucolic street scene and absolutely no tap dancing. Some light oboe in particularly emotional scenes is fine

THE PEOPLE WHO MADE IT POSSIBLE

WORDS SAM BURNETT

Five of the movers behind the fastest brand on Earth

ETTORE BUGATTI

Company founder

Ettore Bugatti was born in Milan in 1881 to furniture and jewellery designer Carlo Bugatti and his wife Teresa – the whole family was a bit artsy, his uncle a painter and his brother and grandad both sculptors.

Black sheep Ettore was partial to a bit of engineering, building his first car at 17. He worked his way up, designing cars for De Dietrich (he was so young his dad had to co-sign his contract here) and Deutz and founded his own car company in 1909 in Molsheim, Alsace.

He didn't just design cars – he penned everything from planes and trains to fishing rods and filed around 1,000 patents during his lifetime. Sadly he never managed to bounce back after World War Two.

JEAN BUGATTI

Designer and engineer

The third child of Ettore, Gianoberto was the eldest son, born in Cologne in 1909 to Ettore and wife Barbara. When they moved to France Gianoberto soon became Jean, and he combined his father's engineering prowess with a flair for design, styling bodies for the company's cars and crafting a look that still influences the company's output even today.

He took over the running of the company at the age of 27 in 1936, but his life was cut tragically short in 1939 at the wheel of that year's Le Mans winning Type 57C Tank on roads near the factory. His death was a devastating blow not just for Ettore and the family, but it also left the company without a clear succession in place.

JEAN-PIERRE WIMILLE

Racing driver

Racer Wimille was born in Paris in 1908 with a keen interest in cars from an early age. His first race at 22 in 1930 was in a Bugatti and by 1932 he was winning regularly. Two years later he got a contract to race as a Bugatti works driver, giving racing credibility to Jean Bugatti's wild designs.

He's been hailed as one of the best French drivers who ever lived, and his Le Mans wins in 1937 and 1939 sealed Bugatti's sporting image, while Wimille worked during the war as an agent for the British Special Operations Executive in Paris, and died at the Buenos Aires GP in 1949.

Honourable mentions to modern drivers Andy Wallace and Pierre-Henri Raphanel who carry the torch in the modern era.

FERDINAND PIËCH

Chairman of Volkswagen

The original Bugatti firm stopped in 1952, a late 1980s Italian backed revival was mildly successful, but it was the formidable Volkswagen Group boss (and grandson of Porsche's founder) Ferdinand Piëch who nailed the Bugatti revival in 1998, folding it into an ever growing mix with other premium brands such as Lamborghini and Bentley.

There probably won't be another automotive CEO like him. He bestrode the car industry like a behemoth, one of the few car bosses with the strength of personality to drive a ridiculous car like the 2005 Veyron all the way through from concept to production. The company lost millions, but Ferdinand Piëch was fully committed to this halo engineering project.

MATE RIMAC

CEO of Bugatti Rimac

Rimac was born in 1988 and grew up in Germany as his family escaped the Bosnian war. They moved to Croatia in 2000, and barely into his late 30s the entrepreneur has reached the top of the car industry despite dropping out of university.

His electric hypercar startup (with a lucrative side business in providing batteries to half the car industry) has been folded in with Bugatti as a joint venture part owned by Porsche, with Rimac in charge of things.

Some worried that would mean Bugatti losing its soul, but the 8.3-litre V16 hybrid Tourbillon is a worthy riposte, selling out in months. So far so good – and on the plus side there's no Bugatti SUV on the horizon yet.

BUGATTI
450
KM/H
500

WALLACE AND VOMIT

Only one man has blasted past the magical 300mph barrier in a production car, lived to tell the tale and kept his lunch down. Andy Wallace is a titan of top speed runs, a vanquisher of vmax and one of the nicest blokes you'll ever meet. Here's everything he's taught us.

1. Jump to it

Suppose you could call this bit 'expect the unexpected' because Ehra-Lessien (the venue for the Chiron Super Sport's 304.8mph record run) was "repaved halfway round the bit where you do vmax, and there's a join between the new surface and the old bit", Andy explains. "I was coming back and saying to the engineers 'Oh, the car's quite stable over the jump' and they were getting quite annoyed, saying 'What jump are you on about? It can't be off the ground'. They looked at the data and came back saying 'Oh, you're right – it's a jump'. That was at about 270mph."

2. Hold on TIGHT

At 304mph the tearing force acting on the tyre is 7,000kg – three and a half Chirons. The gyroscopic mayhem caused by 4,100rpm wheels locks out the front steering geometry and scrambles the steering's ability to self-centre. Apply too much lock and you might not be able to pull it back straight. To be fair, aeroplanes normally fly at this kind of speed, so you'd expect some unusual handling traits.

3. Fit for purpose

The record car was no ordinary Chiron. The Super Sport 300+ Prototype was 250mm longer with a significantly lower ride height to reduce drag. At the rear, the longtail had a reduced cross section (to aid aero and minimise drag), while the rear wing and air brake were removed, replaced with a static unit.

4. Screw the rules

The Guinness speed record rules are as follows. The car must achieve the speed in two directions on the same road within 60 minutes, with the average of the two speeds the result. Andy only ran the speed in one direction. Bugatti says the main reason for this is that, after decades of cars pounding over its surface in the clockwise direction, the tarmac structure has rolled that way. Run it in the opposite direction, and you're working against the grain, causing huge heat build up in the tyres.

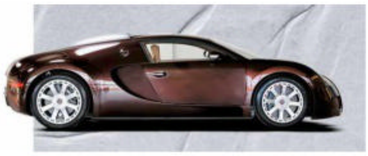
5. Balance is everything

While you want to keep the car on the ground, you can't just throw downforce at it. Downforce means drag, which requires more power, and greater heat through the tyres. What you want is a balance between two tonnes of lift and two tonnes of negative lift (downforce); in essence four tonnes of force trying to rip the chassis in two. However, if balanced properly, vmax sees merely the static weight of the car keeping it on the ground, reducing tyre load, tyre heat and the chances of a crash.

The specials

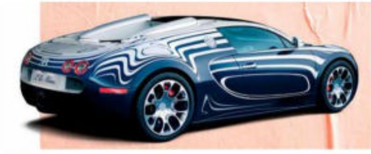
Think Bugatti's immune to daft one-off special editions? Think again...

WORDS SAM BURNETT



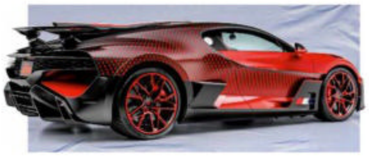
Veyron Fbg par Hermès 2008

Four were made in collaboration with Hermés, all featuring bull calfskin interiors



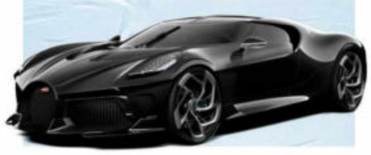
Veyron 16.4 Grand Sport L'Or Blanc 2011

The 'white gold' in the name refers to the porcelain trim bits and wacky paintjob



Divo Lady Bug 2021

A paintjob so intricate, it took Bugatti two years and a whole lot of head scratching to get right



La Voiture Noire 2019

A tribute to one of four Type 57 SC Atlantics lost when the Nazis seized factory in 1940. Cost £12m

ID. EVERY1

THINK ~~SMALL~~ AGAIN

Volkswagen's recent history has been… patchy – Dieselgate, annoying touchscreens, you know the rest. Question is, can VW turn its fortunes around by thinking… tiny?

WORDS PAUL HORRELL
PHOTOGRAPHY WILSON HENNESSY

Think small.

This little car has a big, big task.

From 2027 the production version should reinvent Volkswagen, literally from the bottom up. To you and me it's just a car – a smart one and, at £18,000, a cheap one. To Volkswagen it's much more: redemption. VW's electric story so far has very much had its ups and downs, and the downs have been painful and self-inflicted.

The story arc begins when Dieselgate broke, back in 2015. VW was already planning bespoke electric cars, even if we saw no evidence until the ID concept in autumn 2016. Since the first Golf, VW – despite dark beginnings under the Nazis – always thought of itself as a force for good, a big employer making sound people's cars, boosting the economy. The diesel scandal showed a malevolent side, and it wanted to regain the high ground. The ID cars were to be the route, and they were fast tracked.

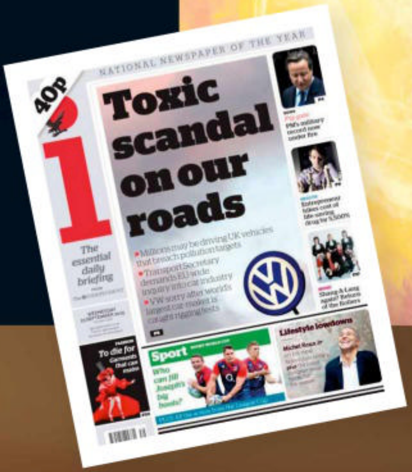
Too fast. Software woes meant they launched late and unfinished. Germany's biggest corporations do autos, finance, utilities. The country has produced no great software or data company. I suspect that's because of a second ugly period in the country's history. After the postwar split, the communist part's all pervasive internal intelligence network, the Stasi, relied on hundreds of thousands of civilian informants. Neighbour spied on neighbour. Since reunification, a deep cultural attachment to privacy still remains. Start any German car and the screen won't come on until you've prodded a data sharing agreement button. And so, in 2015 when VW wanted to design a range of connected EVs, it couldn't find the software talent.

Besides, those ID cars were developed in the industry standard way, just as a Golf is. VW sets the basic design requirements, and then 'tier 1' suppliers take responsibility for separate systems. Bosch the engine management, Continental the braking, ZF the chassis, Magna this, Valeo that. The actual car manufacturer is in many ways an integrator and assembler. But a connected EV is defined by its software, and all systems have to run one common OS designed by one set of engineers: battery management, motor control, power and regeneration, as well as embedded connected navigation for charge planning. The early ID cars were a patchwork, not a weave. And the patches came unpicked.

The VW Group has since set up successive new software organisations and divisions, and kept dismantling or 'reorienting' them. Now it has a partnership with XPeng to develop software for its cars sold in China, and recently a multibillion investment in Rivian that will provide software for VWs in the rest of the world in future. Meanwhile, to be fair, the in-house system is getting better and more reliable. The screen freezes *TopGear* suffered in pretty well every VW Group car – EV or ICE – from about 2020–2023 have now largely stopped, and ID cars on the road have been updated. Indeed, Silke Bagschik, chief of the ID line, told me that after the update rollout, they thought their customer fault reporting system had gone down. Because no faults were reported.

There's more though. The VW brand itself is a huge business that makes barely any money – two per cent margin – and has peered over a

IMAGES: GETTY



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NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

i

The essential daily briefing

Toxic scandal on our roads

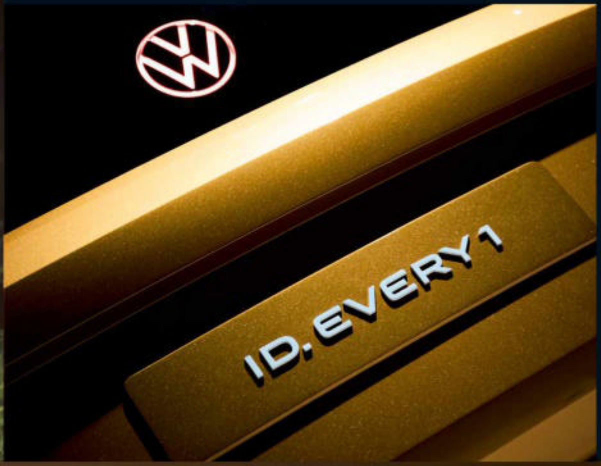
- Millions may be driving UK vehicles that breach pollution targets
- Transport Secretary demands EU-wide inquiry into car industry
- VW sorry after world's largest car maker is caught rigging tests

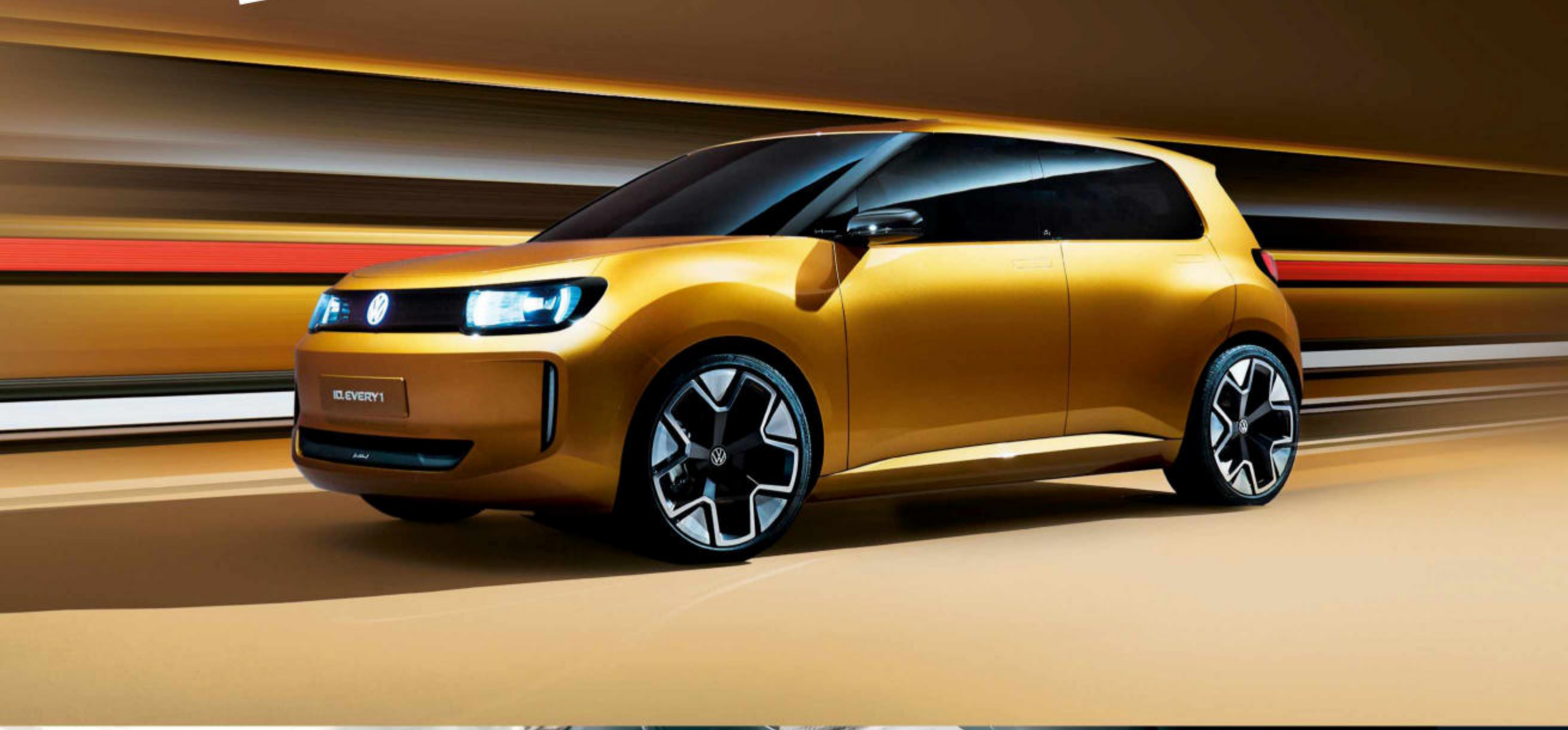
To die for

Sport

Who can fill Joseph's big boots?

Lifestyle lowdown



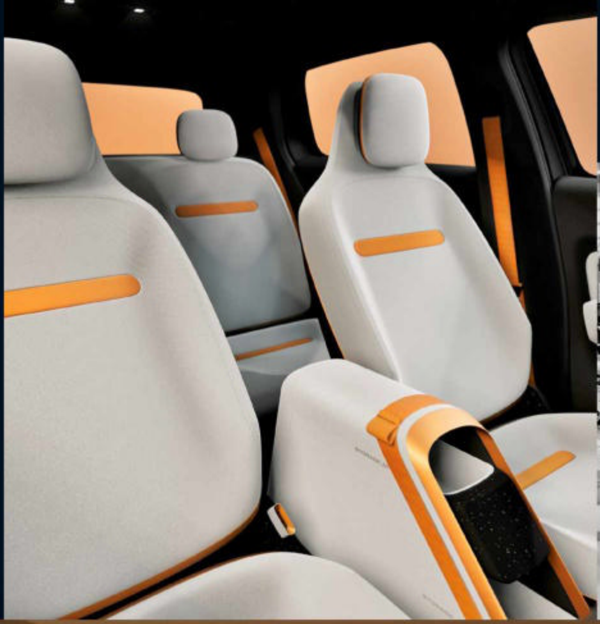


Name might not stay – the Nightclub Bouncers' Association is disputing the trademark

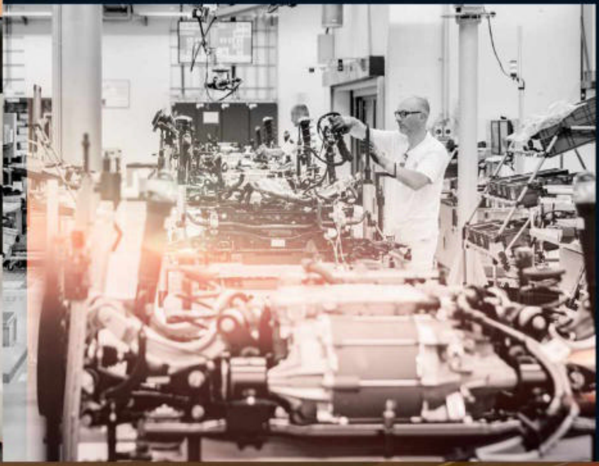
No big deal, but if we could all just forget the last five years that'd be great

The new electric Up replacement won't be big, but it should be clever

> "THE EARLY ID CARS WERE A PATCHWORK, NOT A WEAVE. AND THE PATCHES CAME UNPICKED"



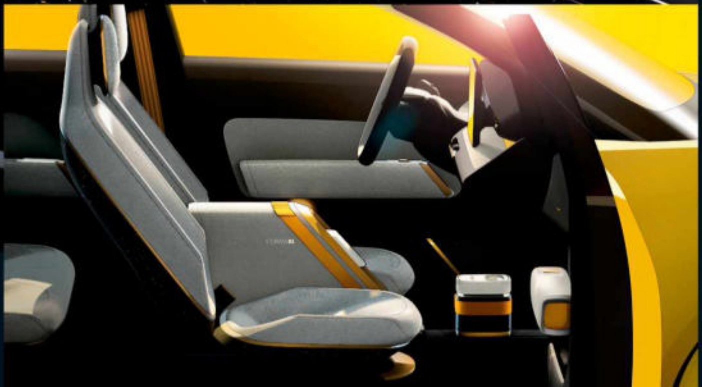
As far as a German engineer is concerned, this is fully whimsical



Back end lights up like Blackpool at Xmas, but you don't need Susan Boyle to turn them on

CUPHOLDERS
MAGNETIC SHELVES
PULL OR PUSH
COFFEE BOOST

Ooh, let's play a quick game of *Star Wars* ship or interior cubbyhole rendering...



precipice of mounting future costs and brutal Chinese competition. Painful negotiations with the unions have now got agreements to shut production lines and two small factories in Germany, cut the German workforce by 35,000 by 2030, do without wage increases for five years, and in the process aim to save £3.4 billion a year midterm. Some of these problems were down to VW's failure to be lightfooted enough, others affected the whole industry. Even so Bagschik admits VW in Europe isn't yet able to cost match the Chinese. "We need lower prices on energy and raw materials," and she talks of a level playing field – likely code for tariffs.

So if people are going to buy VWs against all that backdrop, they'd better be attractive. Was the ID.3? A facelift has improved it, but its launch design was a space age pod for virtue signalling early EV adopters, and its interior an unpadded cell with flaky infotainment.

So, redemption, then… for Dieselgate, for bad software, for a high cost base that brings high prices, and for design that sadly lacks the reassuring solid friendliness a Volkswagen should have. The ID.1 bears a lot of weight, or weights, on its shoulders.

Well, I call it the ID.1. Volkswagen calls this concept the ID.EVERY1, and by production time it might be called ID.UP!, because the Up is the car whose role and spirit it inherits. Equally, what's now the ID.2all concept may well be called ID.Polo when it hits showrooms next year. If the ID.EVERY1's name changes, its shape won't. The shape and proportions and purity – well, once you've added windscreen wipers and normal doorhandles – will stay. VW design boss Andy Mindt is adamant. "Everything we show now *is* the exterior."

It shares with the Up that clever quality of looking like a real VW, but simpler and more cheerful than the bigger ones. This little golden block is, says Mindt, "a completely friendly car. The face is really human with human eyes." He points out how the eyes, the headlamps, have deep lit borders so the bulb always looks like it's in the centre of the lamp as you walk around the car. "Like the Mona Lisa, it's always watching you. It's a bit spooky."

Between the lamps is a black panel. Mindt didn't want an expressionless body colour strip. "This is friendly, not super cool, not about killing zombies." But black plastic is otherwise banished. "There's no decoration on it, no additional parts. No light bar. No cladding on the doors or sills, no matte black. And this saves money, which we put it into other things like bigger wheels. It's a self confident car, so you never feel underdressed."

"THIS IS FRIENDLY, NOT SUPER COOL, NOT ABOUT KILLING ZOMBIES"

The body has a terrific stance, approachable yet monolithic. The wheelarches are immaculately surfaced, and Mindt points out they're deep above the wheels – visually pulling the wheels out of the body – yet lower down the doors are less waisted because that helps cut drag. Because it's a four seater, the roof has a central channel, which also reduces drag, plus it stiffens the panel so there's no need for supporting structure. Cheaper, lighter, better. The single tailgate panel is simplified, avoiding covers for the opening button or numberplate light, as they're tucked under the bottom edge.

It's a simple two-box outline, with a surprisingly long flat bonnet. Mindt says this makes the car look chunky and safe, reassuring for parents who buy baby cars for their neophyte driver kids. Black-painting the A-posts does the job of visually lengthening the cabin and emphasising forward motion. The upright screen avoids having a big glassy oven in front of the car too, he points out, with the air of a man who was somewhere else – anywhere else – when the shovel nose ID.3 was designed. But then, the first ID cars were shaped to announce their new age drive. The new ID cars, Mindt's ones, are shaped to announce that they're VWs.

Inside, it's simple too. But in their cabins more than their exteriors, production cars tend to migrate away from their concepts. So let's not assume WYSIWYG. But we learn from Mindt that the plan is for an undressed cabin in the base versions becoming more lavish in higher trims or with mountable accessories.

Below the central screen are a physical volume knob and temperature buttons. Yup, VW is rowing back on its widely lambasted all-screen interface. "Let's say our usability concept so far was heavily criticised by customers." The screen will have some permanent icons and a flat menu structure. Besides, cars this size are used as pool and hire cars, with unfamiliar drivers. No one wants to land on holiday and spend two hours jabbing at a screen before they manage to leave the airport car park.

Different cabin layouts suit the three main users – the young on their first car, the old on their last, and shared users like healthcare workers or delivery drivers. It's patronising to assume baby cars are just city cars or second cars. Hence the target of 155+ miles of range, and quick charging too.

The ID.Up, ID.Polo and a crossover too, plus a Cupra and Skodas, will use a new FWD platform. That frees up space in the back for a deep boot and a lockable bay under the back seat cushion for charge cables and, say, a laptop. More importantly, FWD saves cost, bundling all the electronics and high voltage wiring at one end. These cars share some mechanical and electrical parts with the bigger rear motor VW EVs, but the ID.1's 95bhp motor is new. So is the 38kWh lithium iron phosphate battery, a cost saving but robust chemistry in a compact lightweight cell to pack construction. This will be the first car to use that Rivian-VW software. The rear suspension is a torsion beam, not the more expensive multi-link of the bigger cars.

Yes, low manufacturing costs *really* matter here. VW wanted to do a baby EV but didn't know if there was profit in it. So 600 of its engineers went into a room to scratch their heads for cost savings, and VW only gave this car the go-ahead when it'd found enough. Bagschik says for a buyer, the monthly cost, with lease payments and fuel, of the littlest ID will match a petrol baby car. She's not a fan, by the way, of an ICE ban. "There's no need. People get hooked on EVs once they try them. No one wants to take anything if it's mandatory." We'd be Up for this one.

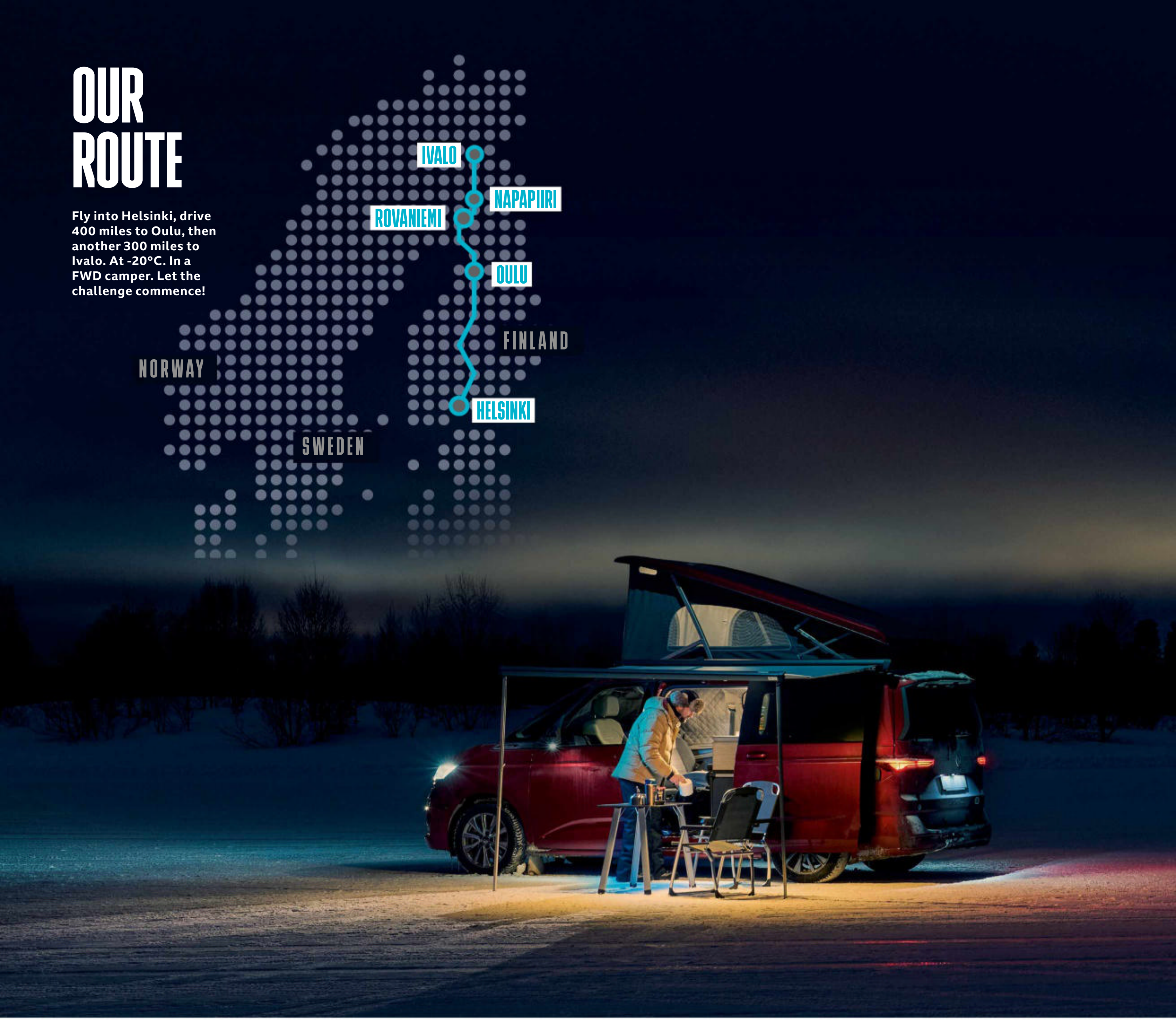
CALIFORNIA FREEZING

The Arctic. Minus 20°C. Sounds just about perfect for a *TopGear* minibreak in a VW California. Fire up the auxilliary heater...

WORDS TOM FORD **PHOTOGRAPHY** JOHN WYCHERLEY

OUR ROUTE

Fly into Helsinki, drive 400 miles to Oulu, then another 300 miles to Ivalo. At -20°C. In a FWD camper. Let the challenge commence!


IVALO
NAPAPIIRI
ROVANIEMI
OULU
FINLAND
NORWAY
HELSINKI
SWEDEN

A cosmic sea lapping against the shores of our atmosphere, that's the way I think of the aurora borealis.

I've seen the northern lights in full force before, and it really was a gently gobsmacking moment, waves of greens, yellows and reds blushed across the night sky in watercolour washes, wonder reflected in the backs of eyes. At the spring equinox, some 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle and 12 miles from the Russian border with Finland, camped on an ice lake as far from artificial light pollution as I could reasonably get, I thought I had a chance of a repeat performance. Nope. There's nothing. Nada. Zilch.

It's -20ºC, I can't be bothered to put on enough clothes to go outside and it wouldn't matter if I did – the sky has been painted institutional grey by clouds intent on Valium views. Still, we hoped for the lights, but what we're actually here for is an untypically deep dive into whether or not the new Volkswagen California camper is actually any good at big miles and random semi-extreme camping, and how aggressively this Ocean spec can defend a price of more than £80k. So far, so unhypothermic, I'm already counting it as a win.

We began, some 700 miles ago, in Helsinki. A longer than anticipated supply run in an absolutely enormous Finnish supermarket for vital survival foods (mainly Jaffa Jims and coffee, the Jims being indigenous Jaffa Cakes, you have to be adventurous in foreign climes), before barging our way to Kempele, just south of the larger town of Oulu for a quick 'n' dirty overnight.

Initial impressions of the Multivan-based California are good. It's got the kind of acceleration that's best described as a gentle push from kind hands, 62mph from rest reached in something around 10 seconds, the point something lost in the mildly gruff combination of 2.0-litre four cylinder petrol engine and seven cog DSG gearbox. The changes are fast, the engine powerful enough at just over 200bhp/236lb ft, but this is a big thing – 2.4 tonnes of weatherproof textile and metal – and we've jammed a bit more than the 450ish kg of official payload into its gut. But it'll settle right back at motorway speeds, especially the Finnish max of 62mph, steering, suspension and brakes all the gentle side of good enough. It's a lightly cumbersome car, but a very nippy house, and small and swivelly enough to negotiate a tight underground car park or urban traffic without needing HGV training. Big miles are easily – if relatively sedately – covered without issue.

It is not, however, the easiest thing to convert to overnight accommodation when you're very tired and everyone else in the crew has a convenient hotel room. And you're staying in the back end of what amounts to a truck stop. It also doesn't have a toilet. Or a shower. Which will become relevant later. But we're going for rest here, not necessarily relaxation, so I just fold the rear pair of seats (the Cali is a four seater) – after reversing the headrests – flap out the mattress pad, swivel the dual captain's chairs, attach/insert/pull down the blackout window blinds and set the auxiliary petrol heater to max. And then wait a bit for it to warm up… most of the above requires open doors and fiddling, and it's still into the double minus figures, and snowing. I don't pop the popup roof, it's not insulated enough and I would likely freeze in some sort of really unfortunate rictus, so low roof it is. And it's… nice. Warm, at least, but with a slight lack of storage and minimal headroom. Yes, you've got cupboards, but not many, and there's no space for a portable toilet, so I resort to, um, bottles. But it's actually a decent bed for one, although tight for two. And you lose the upper sleeping deck when it's too cold.

"WHAT ENSUED WAS LIKELY THE SLOWEST POLICE CHASE OF ALL TIME"

Next morning, and everything is as you might expect. Some late night shenanigans with drunk people around the van led to disturbed sleep, but generally it was pretty cosy, if decidedly practical. But there are miles to do, so we head off again into a pretty snowstorm that proved to be hard work to drive in. The California was imperious mind, even with just front wheel drive rather than the optional AWD. Yes, it's fitted with winter tyres, but it managed traction on fresh powder with very little fuss. Braking distances are doubled and accompanied by the fizz and chatter of excited ABS, but it'll go and stop with a remarkable lack of interest. Which is what you want – flamboyant dynamic behaviour in 'I need to stop before crashing' braking phases is generally unwelcome.

There was, however, more to come. As in, more and more miles – some 350-ish needed to be added before we reached the top of our journey, which slightly stalled when the Finnish police blocked the petrol pump I was using and detained us. Now, this might seem blindingly obvious in hindsight, but we really didn't think about our proximity to the Russian border and our use of drones. Fully legal and insured, we were filming the California on a particular stretch of road and were reported by some passersby. What ensued was likely the slowest police chase of all time, seeing as we had subsequently moved on and the police had to chase us for 25 miles, before catching up to us at the petrol station. And when a Finnish policeperson gets a little bit in your face, you pay attention – Finns are remarkably good at the stoic seriousness that speaks of fines, deportations and cavity searches. It took a little persuasion, but eventually we convinced the police that we weren't the world's worst prepared insurgents, but merely hapless magazine makers, and we were let go. And the cops were really nice after all, although the last words of one made me think quite a lot. "Given the state of the world right now, and our neighbours, we had to check." Which makes you think all sorts of things about borders, proximity and caution. And making sure you don't lob drones into the sky without thinking properly about where you are.

Crisis averted, we kept on keeping on, safe and secure in our California even when the landscape morphed from cheerily Christmassy – the Arctic Circle line in Napapiiri is Santa central and tooth rottingly twee – to something more barren and properly arctic. There is still a lot of silver birch and Finnish pine, but they take a lot longer to grow up here, lightly crippled by the wind and cold. But eventually, we made it to our final testing destination to put the VW properly through its paces. A literal testing destination – UTAC Ivalo, the most northerly automotive test facility in the world. Now, there are several UTACs globally – the big test site in the UK is in Millbrook in Bedfordshire – but there are also facilities in France, Morocco, Michigan and California, Trebur in Germany and offices in China. But UTAC Finland is special, because it's the ice lab. Test facilities for cars do all sorts of stuff, but Ivalo contains some really weird setups with

Top tip: the local charcuterie is also useful for self defence

Jaffa Jims, Um-Bongo and a week's worth of reindeer burgers? Tick

Tom was hoping to watch a good film on his phone, but it's *Frozen*

KY74 TWL
Suuri kolaririski

Roads are nice and empty at least – everyone sensible is inside

Everything tastes a little different here, especially the apple juice. Weirdly warm

The fashion police had been tipped off about Tom's hat

NAPAPIIRI
ARCTIC CIRCLE
NUORGAM
INARI
KILPISJÄRVI
ENONTEKIÖ
KITTILÄ
SODANKYLÄ
New York 6204
Moscow 1350
Peking 6680
London
Athens
Berlin

LAPPISH RESTAURANT
MELLAKKA
1h

Happy meal means something very different around here

Never has a camper's built-in fridge been more superfluous

Very big landscape vs a tiny car. Actually, where even is it?

Y74 TWL
UTAC

“THE CAMPER SKIDDED ABOUT IN A VERY UNCAMPERLIKE MANNER”

VW CALIFORNIA OCEAN 2.0 TSI

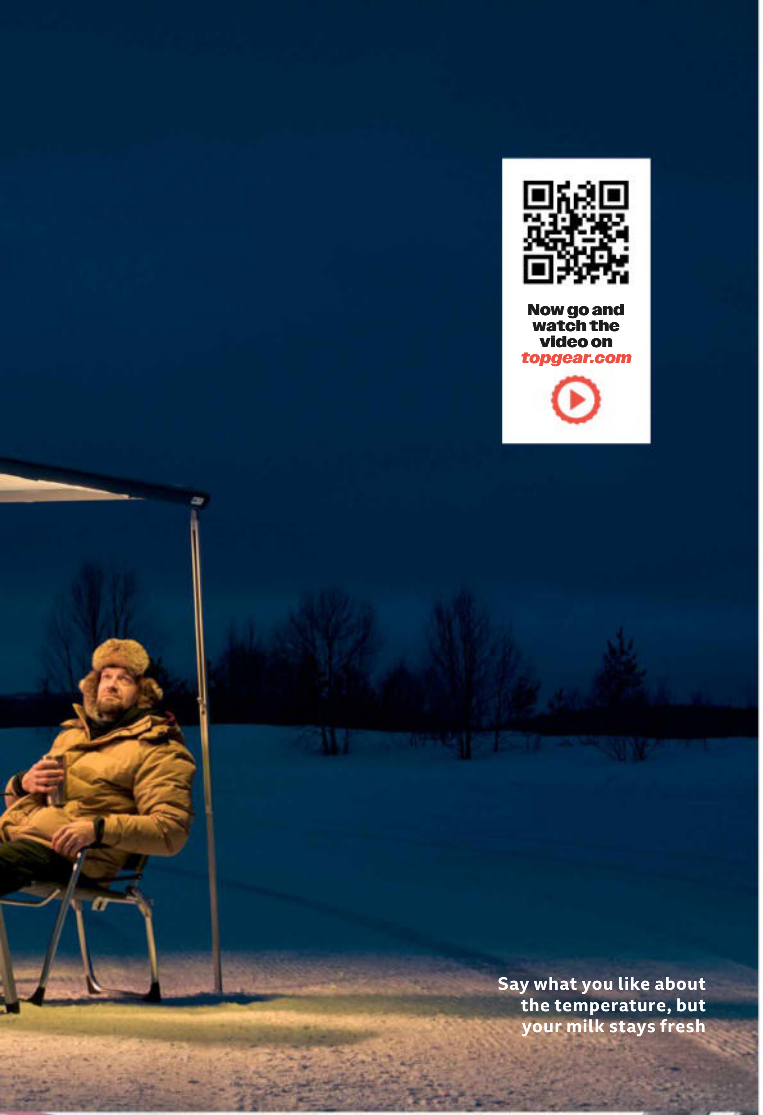
Price: £80,392
Powertrain: 2.0-litre turbo 4cyl, 201bhp, 236lb ft
Transmission: 7spd DSG, FWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 10.0secs, 124mph
Economy: 30.6mpg/210g/km CO_2
Weight: 2,394kg

Track 27
No entry without permission
UTAC

which you can assess electronics, tyres, systems and all things car. Yes, there are the usual open forest tracks, ice tracks, snow tracks and giant circular tracks – all of which we sampled in the name of ‘testing’ – but they’re not even the good bits. The 1,000 metre long, 100 metre wide landing strip – graded like a ski slope on the flat – is fun, even in a VW camper, but the oddities are actually inside.

Yep, to maintain the ability to cold weather test even in the Finnish summer, UTAC Ivalo has a series of indoor test labs that are on a scale you wouldn’t believe. Giant car chillers that mean you can do cold starts from -50°C every day. A snow drag strip that’s six lanes wide and 410 metres long that loops into an indoor snow handling circuit. A similar straight test track that’s made of nothing but clear, slick ice – exclusively to test studded tyres. All temperature controlled, freezing and packed with snow harvested from the site during winter.

He's been like this for 45 minutes, should we do something?



Now go and watch the video on topgear.com

Say what you like about the temperature, but your milk stays fresh

It's deeply weird and utterly brilliant, little cathedrals of testing, like dwarven underground halls. And the camper traversed them all, skidding about in a very uncamperlike manner, safe, secure, and above all warm. And that's what it's about here, taking the vagaries of nature and minimising the variables, making the testing repeatable, robotic and measurable. If you ever wondered how brutally and incessantly new stuff was tested and developed, UTAC Ivalo has all the equipment for automotive torture.

Which is kind of where we came in – the ice lake I then camped on is in one of Ivalo's far corners, away from prying eyes and bright lights. I make a proper camp this time, more familiar with the setup. The awning unfurled, the camping tables and chairs from the tailgate unslotted. The single ring burner produced hot drinks, and the poptop popped. It's designed to have a tent threaded through the rail on the other side, and once it's all out and open, you can see how summers would be more spaciously passed in this thing. But this is not summer, so when it's time to sleep you have to drop the roof and snuggle down. And no, we didn't get the lights, but we did get… peace. No sound, other than the vague tap of the auxiliary heater, controlled by a little touchpad inside the Cali. Everyone disappeared to local hotels, and I spent 14 hours by myself, in the middle of nowhere. And that's when I got it. A camper is really about freedom. The ability to just get in and go, set yourself up in some pretty corner and wake to a different view every day. Once you get yourself familiar, fill the Cali with the stuff you really need, it works. Even when the conditions are on the far side of what you might expect.

There are things I'd improve. A portable toilet is handy for cold climate situations, a bit more storage would be welcome, and some of the bits are fiddly. But it's packed with functionality. Soon enough though, the crew arrives and it's time to think about reversing the journey. I'm not sure how I smell, mainly because I'm wearing four layers of clothes, but also because I fear I have become accustomed. The fact that Harry the videographer leaned back at a 45° angle when I opened the door might indicate the latter. There's a test driver doing lazy donuts around the campsite in a BMW 5-Series, and it feels like I've awoken on a movie set. Packed back up, I do a few more slippery laps around some of the test tracks and call it good, get ready to reverse the journey back to Helsinki. And I keep thinking the same thing… this is an expensive VW Multivan, but cheap for a tiny home that really can cope with pretty much anything. They say you can sleep in your car, but you can't race your house. In the California, it turns out you can do both.

> “A CAMPER IS ABOUT FREEDOM. THE ABILITY TO GET IN AND GO”

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** OLGUN KORDAL

Ever had a long wait for a recovery van? Not any more. *TopGear*

RESPONSE

is about to come to the rescue. With a slightly reduced toolkit...

The AA Christmas calendar had found its cover model... the car, not Ollie

Of course it's a Disco.

It's *always* a Disco.

First call out of the day and I'm first on the scene. That was the plan of course, and it's worked a treat. Now, what had Dominic told me it was likely to be? Ah, that's right, it's a Land Rover, therefore… almost anything: blown turbo, glitchy electrics, belts, water pump, front diff, front wheel hubs, air suspension, cracked engine block…

I open up the MC20's toolkit. It contains a towing eye. Nothing else. Hmm. Hang about, Dominic shoved a chunky battery starter pack in the Maserati's footwell earlier, seeing as battery issues account for about 20 per cent of callouts. I connect it up. Much clicking, no life. And that's me done, out of ideas. All I'm good for right now is tea and sympathy. My shoulders sink as I realise I left my flask at the hotel this morning. I smile wanly at the beleaguered Disco driver, "At least the sun's out…"

We've all heard the horror stories, people waiting for hours for the recovery services to turn up, stranded on the hard shoulder of the M40 for two hours (that'll be me), broken down in roadworks on the M4 after a piston went through the block (also me). How to solve this? Get to people faster, duh. Where some would suggest more patrol vans, *TopGear* suggests speed. We've built the AA a rapid response vehicle.

Well, I say built, but what we've actually done is livery up Maserati's 620bhp mid-engined supercar, sucker some lights on top and headed off to help one of the UK's most remote patrols cover his Highland patch. My thinking was that he must have a huge area to cover and on these corking roads I could get from one end of the Highlands to the other a mite faster than a 113bhp Ford Transit. True though that may be, it's not how it works. Instead a 62 mile radius is drawn around the patrol's front door and that, literally, is their sphere of influence.

Dominic Carroll has been an AA patrol for eight years. Like most others he was a mechanic first, a Gold level Vauxhall tech who fancied a change. After a month's training and two weeks working alongside a mentor, he was ready to discover a whole new world of vehicle repairs beyond Vectras and Corsas. This is his turf and today we've been brought together to form the AA's Highland Patrol, which means we can put an addendum on the AA's frankly pretty weak slogan. 'Always ahead. Thanks to 620bhp.'

Actually, the AA used to have a bespoke Highland Patrol. Mounted in Land Rovers they'd cruise around looking for members they could assist. In pre-mobile times away from motorway emergency phones, that was how it was done. It's all much more high tech today. And reliable presumably, seeing as the Land Rovers have long since been retired. A few patrols up here are mounted in four wheel drive Volkswagen Transporter 4Motions to combat remote winter callouts.

Dom arrives at the stranded Disco 15 minutes later, an interval in which I've learned that the Maserati's main role is to be a distraction until the cavalry arrives. The most valuable tool on board the Transit is the knowledge management system, a built in computer that's a bit like Wikipedia for patrols. Not only is it chock full of information on typical issues for any given car, it allows each patrol to edit entries to say how they fixed them. A wifi booster means it still works in remote areas. Mostly. We are very remote today. An alternator issue is quickly diagnosed, and 10 minutes later the Disco is on its way.

Dom gives me a tour of his van, pointing out the immediate areas where the Maserati falls flat. "We have to have cross cab access plus a sliding door on the safe side." I look at the MC20 and picture clambering across the transmission tunnel and out through the upwards opening door on my hands and knees – not an image of

competence and capability. "I tend to leave the van out a bit so it protects me working around the car in front. On motorways we have to leave 18 metres of clearance between van and customer car – that's called the crush zone for obvious reasons."

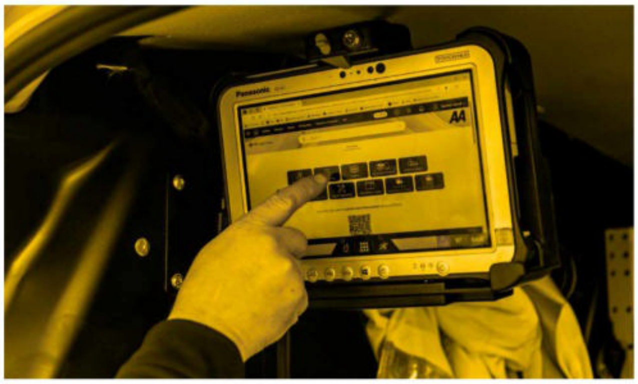
Dom's Transit is brand new – he's happy because the AA fast tracked it to him specially for today. The sliding door opens to reveal… everything. Not just big ticket items like batteries and spacesaver wheels, or generic items such as pumping airbags to get into locked cars, clutch cables, amalgamating tape, reflective card to replace mirrors, cable ties and lens tape ("Haven't used that for about a year"), but even car specific repairs. "See this? This is really good," Dom shows me a little metal sleeve. "It's a gear selector repair kit for a Fiat 500 and Ford Ka – we do this repair pretty much all the time. People think they've got a clutch issue on their 500, but it's actually the gear selector's ball connector. It's plastic and wears over time. Before we got these, we used to use a disposable glove and clamp that in place. But this is pretty much permanent."

Around 80 per cent of issues can be fixed at the roadside, reckons Dom. Those that can't require recovery. The back of every Transit is filled with a compact recovery trailer (CRT) that swings out hydraulically and clamps on the towbar. "If we hadn't been able to get that Discovery going then we'd have had to call a flatbed, because this has a tow limit of around 2,000kg."

This is akin to an issue I've run into with recovery services before – no matter how much you tell the call centre to just send recovery because every tyre is punctured or there's a hole in the engine block, for a variety of reasons around insurance and health and safety they have to send a patrol to assess the issue first. Meaning more delays and frustration. But then sometimes punters don't know what they're talking about or are, er, economical with the truth. "I once had a callout where a customer had told us his car was suffering a fuel cutoff issue and when I got there, there was fire, police, ambulance and the car was upside down in the middle of a field. The fuel cutoff wasn't the only issue there, was it?"

Deploy the towing device! Unless your car weighs more than 2,000kg, then you're stuck

The international symbol for 'help, I don't have a clue what I'm doing'



I'm hoping for similar drama today, but the next call sounds fairly prosaic – a Mercedes with a flat tyre. That and batteries are the most common callouts. Having failed to slot the spacesaver spare in the Maserati's boot, I hotfoot to despatch tea and sympathy… well sympathy, to the afflicted party.

The trouble is that on single track Highland roads the Maserati isn't actually that fast. Even by supercar standards ground clearance is hopeless. It scuffs and scrapes its belly everywhere, so I slow down and the Transit catches up. There's a nose lift, but it drops back down above 25mph. But it does have things in its favour. Speed, when you can deploy it, comes as effortlessly as breathing, the twin turbo V6 barely having to work. It's comfortable too, with fine seats and a calm, placid ride, plus it sups fuel sparingly (even though the fuel gauge is a terrible fibber, screaming at you to fill up when there's still 20 litres in there). Spend a day in here? No issue at all.

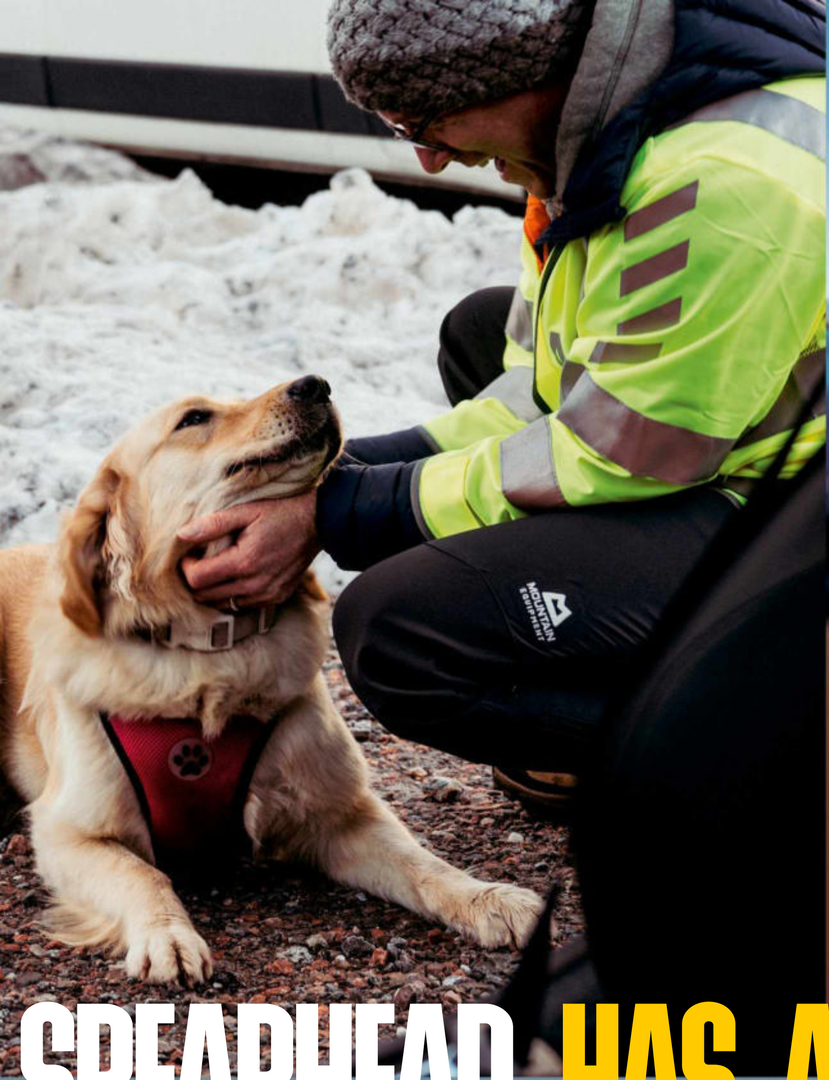
But mainly the MC20 looks flipping fantastic as an AA early warning vehicle. When the sun's on it the Giallo Genio paintwork

This time the 3hr response is because we came via all the good roads we could find

"ON SINGLE TRACK HIGHLAND ROADS THE MASERATI ISN'T ACTUALLY THAT FAST"

“HOW FITTING THAT THE AA’S NEW

Maserati
AA
MULTI-FIT
80
MC20 ART



SPEARHEAD HAS A TRIDENT BADGE"

“THE YELLOW PAINT IS A £10K OPTION, BUT COMES FREE WITH EVERY AA VAN”

MASERATI MC20

Price: £222,025 (£310,735 as tested)
Engine: 3.0-litre twin turbo V6 621bhp, 538lb ft
Performance: 0–62mph in 2.9 seconds, 202mph
Economy: 24.6mpg, 261g/km CO_2
Weight: 1,475kg

proves a near exact match for the AA's Ford M8 yellow. Bit more costly though – thick, rich and heavily pearlescent, it's a £9,650 option at Maserati, but comes free with every AA van. Special order obviously, seeing as the vans are built in batches by Ford and VW (the only two AA suppliers). The last order was 740 new shape Transits. They join a nationwide fleet of 2,800 vans, 250 trucks and one (temporary) Maserati.

Personally, I'm looking past Maserati's troubled relationship with reliability and focusing on how fitting it is that the AA's new spearhead has a trident badge. And winter tyres. And a V6 that doubles as a boot warmer. Not sure that's intentional. Or desirable, as when I pull up at the Mercedes and open the boot I rediscover the teacakes I bought on the way up yesterday to dispense to those in need. Chocolate is seeping out of the foil cases.

The Merc CLS is a breeze. The owner wasn't confident using the jack, so Dom and I look like high-vis heroes, wielding trolley jack and wheel gun and switching it to the spacesaver in F1 pitstop time. One thing though – to absolve itself of complete responsibility the AA tells customers they need to check the wheelnut torque in 30 miles. Bet none do. And yes, there is an algorithm that prioritises cases based on location, gender, age, weather conditions, danger and so on. It doesn't chide you for choosing an unreliable car though, so that's something if you have a Fiat, McLaren (yes, Dom has seen a few – "Always electrics in those") or Jaguar Land Rover product.

Dom averages about 10 callouts per 10 hour shift. "I like to get the easy jobs done quickly, so I've got more time to spend on the trickier ones. Those are more satisfying – we get a few calls that are just operator issues. I even had one where someone had bought a new car and didn't know it only started if you had the clutch pressed. Most of the time that's picked up in the call centre." And yes, he has once had to fix his own van – puncture, somewhat predictably.

What about EVs that are out of charge, I ask him? The RAC carries a charging pack to get customers mobile again. "We don't do that – those packs are slow to charge, so we think it's better to take the car to a charger." Fair enough, leaving aside the fact that most electric vehicles are probably too heavy to be hooked up to the CRT. "Actually, most issues with electric cars are when someone's at a charger and can't disconnect the cable or the charger's not working and they've got very little battery. It's rare that someone actually runs out on the road."

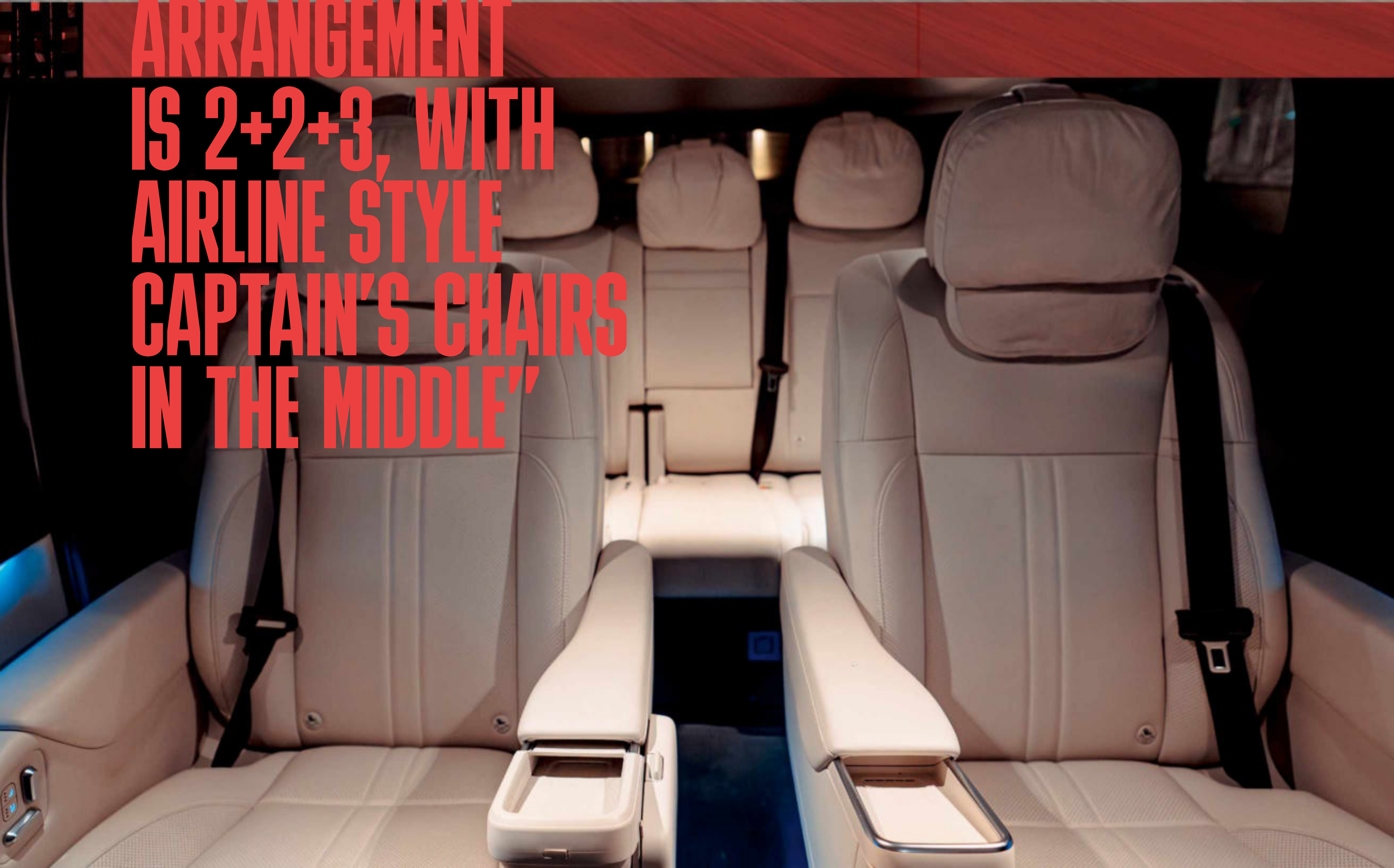
What does Dom almost never get called out to? "Honda Jazz. Flat batteries, flat tyres, that's it on those. I've never had a callout for a Honda engine. I know a couple of patrols who are ex-Honda techs and we tease them that they've never served apprenticeships because all they've done are brakes and servicing."

As an emergency service, *TopGear* Roadside Assist Watch has been found wanting. Not so much the fourth emergency service, as the 35th. We've improved speed and responsiveness (might have a go at the ambulance service next), failed miserably to actually fix anything (on second thoughts...). I've learned my lesson for next time: don't forget the thermos.

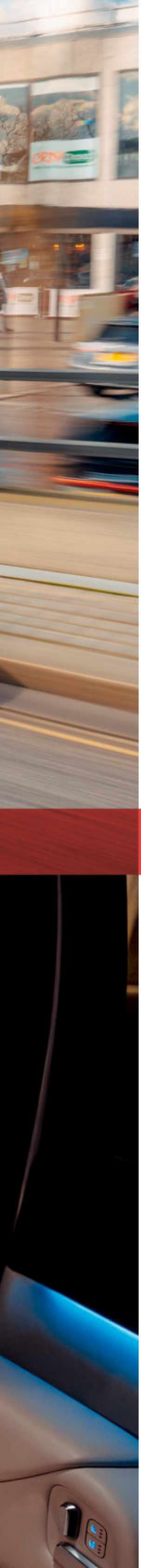
ALL ABOARD THE MEGA BUS

Whisper it, but there could be an MPV revival underway. Spearheading the renaissance is this, the Li Auto Mega

WORDS TOM FORD **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI



“THE SEATING ARRANGEMENT IS 2+2+3, WITH AIRLINE STYLE CAPTAIN’S CHAIRS IN THE MIDDLE”



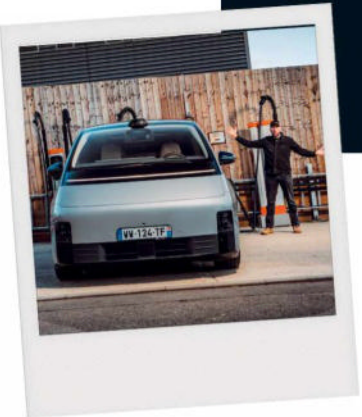
Incarnate zeitgeist is all the rage until it isn't, and everyone shifts the schtick to something else. It happens relatively quickly, and sometimes... not for the better. Take the MPV. The genuine multipurpose vehicle, the minivan shape, has fallen foul of fashion. The exact rules of these transitions can be hard to follow, gently dictated by car companies and buyer insecurity, but the MPV satisfies a need. Just because the shape has been usurped by the faux by four, it doesn't mean that need has ceased to exist. People still need to move larger groups in comfort in car form. Of course you can do that in an SUV, but a boxy MPV will always win the space and comfort war – and when extreme utility speaks, it's convincing.

We're not talking about converted live axle vans here, either. Putting windows and leather into a commercial platform always ends up feeling like exactly that: a commercial platform with a thin veneer of bougie tinsel slathered on top. But in east Asia the MPV hasn't fallen out of favour, it's kept evolving. And now it has some really compelling cars.

Take the Li Auto Mega as an example. Li Auto is a Chinese company more accustomed to providing plug-in hybrid SUVs, but has birthed the Mega as a first try at a full electric vehicle, 'urban' transport for seven apparently, with a generous 350+mile range. It charges faster than the UK network can provide, capable of 'hyper charging' at 520kW, and looks like real life sci-fi. But the practical application is more prosaic – it'll take seven people and luggage, and do so with a level of comfort you only see in cars costing four times the price.

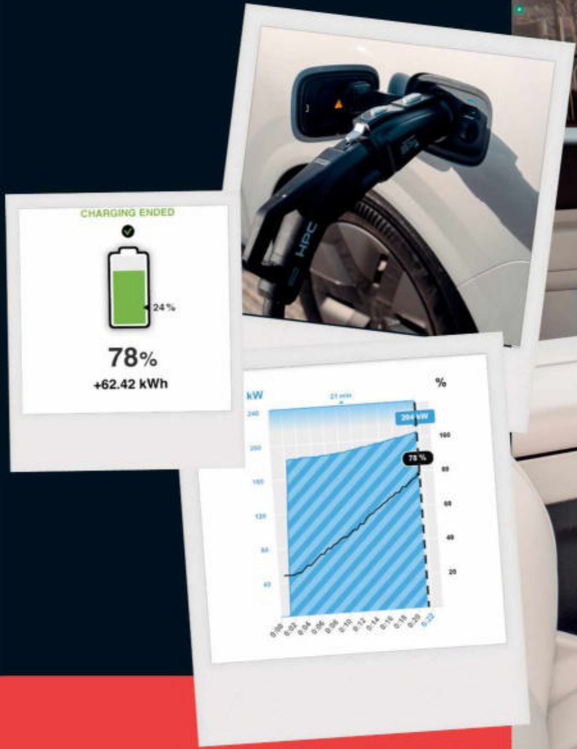
First, the looks. It's designed by Benjamin Baum, the fella responsible for the 992 generation Porsche 911, and it stops traffic. Love it or loathe it, you can't ignore its 5.35m presence. It incorporates the Li Auto fancy light bars front and back, leans heavily into the efficiency aesthetic. In fact, to keep the Porsche theme going, it's more aerodynamically efficient than Porsche's own Taycan EV, a blunt nose and chopped Kamm tail punching through and releasing the airflow respectively. But more than that, it's actually very coherent and stylish even if it is a essentially a big box. And it doesn't look like another SUV with an electric drivetrain stuffed in.

As for the practical bits, dual electric side doors, a big square hatch at the back. The seating arrangement is 2+2+3, with airline style captain's chairs in the middle and a kid friendly bench in the rear. Legroom is enormous, all the seats move, all are heated, with the front four also being cooled. There are massage seats for the front four, a drop down ceiling mounted gesture controlled OLED monitor, a warmed/cooled drawer for snacks, wireless charging all round and more storage than you think you need. Even the back row folds and rolls electrically to give a van sized boot if you need it. You can convert the back into a double bed, electrically obviously, and there are various modes that make the most of the space. Nap mode being a favourite: the car leans back the front seat, sets a timer and then plays birdsong until it's time to wake up, and you slowly rise – literally – from your slumber.



But it's not just about the space – the twin 15.7in front seat displays are cutting edge, instantaneous in operation and painfully clear. They make some European manufacturers' operating systems look like an 8-bit Game Boy, and the iPhone-like tiny touchscreen on the top of the steering wheel is a nice touch. There's MindGPT (an offshoot of ChatGPT) baked in, and the car will react to gestures. Point at a window and say "Open that" and the car will do so, recognising the finger.

Yet that's not even the thing that you notice most when out in the car. This is in no way a driver's car, but it accelerates outside the usual superlatives, gently choking out expectation with a smooth, frictionless feeling whoosh. It'll hit 62mph in 5.5 seconds. And yet, even with this much mass and slab and length, it doesn't feel out of hand or hard to control. In fact, it just makes it nippy. Want to merge smoothly with traffic on an A-road or pull out onto a busy roundabout? The Mega's throttle control, instant acceleration and general AWD grip mean you don't have to worry about getting that length slotted into the right place. There are modes which



CHARGING ENDED

24%

78%

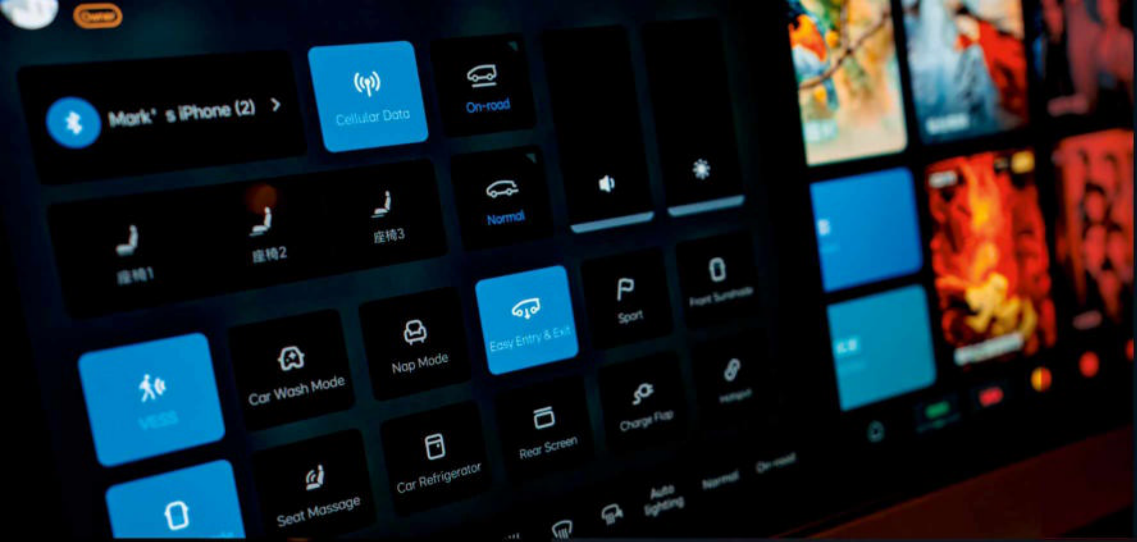
+62.42 kWh

Hyper charging

How fast is fast enough?

The Li Auto Mega's biggest trick isn't the fact that it looks like a Renault Espace crossed with a bullet train, or the space inside, but the fact that it can charge at a peak rate of 520kW, making it one of the fastest charging cars in the world. That's a 102.7kWh CATL 5C Quilin NMC pack that can average 400kW, meaning 312 miles of range in about 10.5 minutes. The typical slowdown of charging over 80 per cent state of charge? The Mega is still pulling 170kW. So on a long journey, a 15 minute pitstop would add all you might reasonably need, and you wouldn't have to visit the petrol station on the way out. Theoretically a faster stop than an ICE car. The problem here is the usual: infrastructure. There's only one 480kW capable charger in the UK, in Blackpool, and even big 350kW chargers are horrendously unreliable when it comes to how much power they actually provide. This situation is different in China, where hyper charging is much more available and reliable. The Mega shows that the tech is there – we just haven't caught up. Yet.

1 **These armchairs wouldn't look out of place in your nan's living room** ***2*** **The front screens will make your WFH setup feel sad** ***3*** **Pop down screen will show all your favourite *TG* vids, as long as you speak Chinese** ***4*** **This thing's over 5.3m long, good luck at the supermarket**


Mark's iPhone (2)
Cellular Data
On-road
Normal
座椅1
座椅2
座椅3
Easy Entry & Exit
Sport
Car Wash Mode
Nap Mode
Charge Flap
Rear Screen
Car Refrigerator
Seat Massage
Auto lighting
Normal
On-road

XXXXXXXXXX

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Normal
Wheels
Front
19.5

4

3

rging
emaining 29min
Stop charging
29%
212 km
173.7 kW
250 A
744 V
100%

GY73 ULH
WW-124-TF

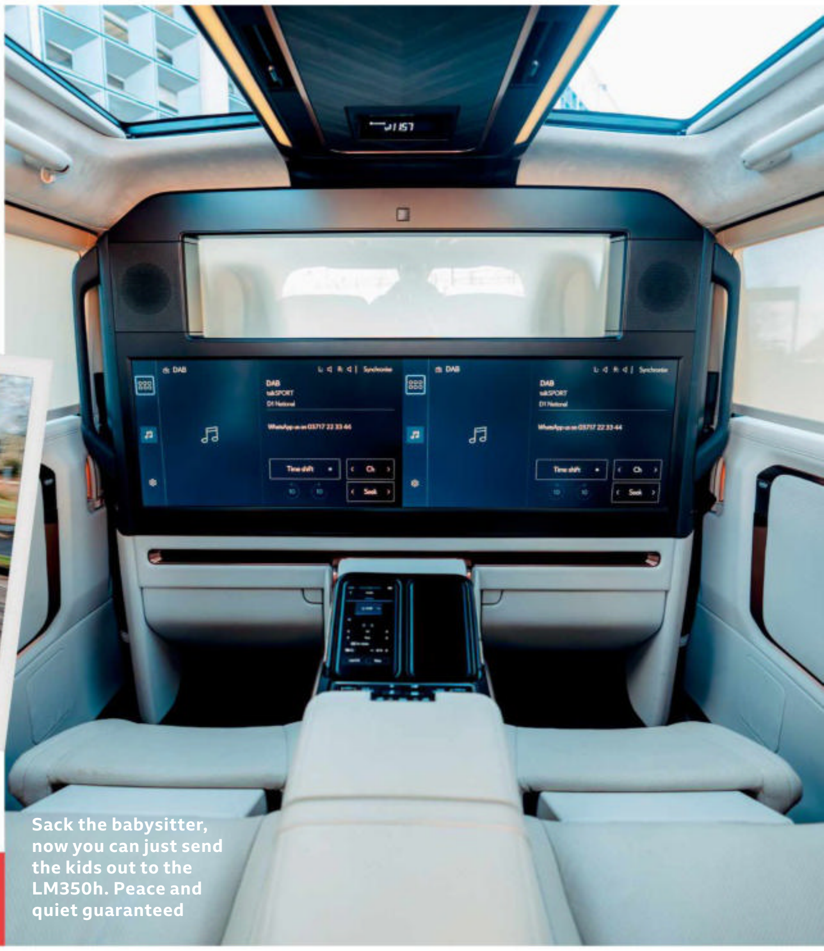
Probably better value than a central London studio flat here

SIDE SHADE
SIDE SHADE
Climate concierge

Audio
Climate
Lights
Seats
Sunshade
Climate concierge

LEXUS
GY73 ULH

"IT'S GOT A 48IN TV MONITOR IN THE DIVIDER BETWEEN DRIVER AND PASSENGERS"



Sack the babysitter, now you can just send the kids out to the LM350h. Peace and quiet guaranteed

change the suspension and throttle aggression, but they are so fine in their nuance, it's only the hardest and softest settings you can really distinguish.

Still, that ride and isolation. It's more like piloting a hovercraft than a car. It's big and heavy, but the way the 'Magic Carpet Air Suspension 3' (to give it its full name) divorces you and your passengers from the outside world will have you doubting the need for road repairs. Which means that the lardy handling really doesn't matter so much. Given the Mega's focus on passengers, it's better to cruise and watch everyone fall asleep.

So yes, it's awesome and a bit weird and not very European and not available here anyway for the forseeable future, so it doesn't really matter. But what do we get in the UK? Well, Lexus has recently killed the LS luxury saloon and brought in a more luxurious minivan, the Lexus LM350h. Actually, to call it a minivan is to do it a disservice. The LM is based on the TNGA-K car platform, and closely related to the Toyota Alphard, which has been doing sterling service in Asia since the world was born. It can come with front wheel drive or all wheel drive, in seven or four seat configurations, all with a 2.5-litre, four cylinder Miller cycle petrol engine with a CVT box and hybrid assistance. And it's MPVtastic. The spec you see in the pictures is the full on limo Takumi grade. Four seats, the two in the back being of the airline variety, with all the same gear as the Mega – wireless charging, massage, heat/cool, just lie flat and think of Japan. It's got a 48in TV monitor in the divider between driver and passengers, with a powered slide up electrochromic screen to give you privacy. It feels much more like a limo than the Mega in terms of setup, less so when it comes to ride. Yes, it has adaptive damping and yes, it's more precise than the Chinese car, but the CVT is noisy and the cushioning has sharper edges. But it is better quality than the Mega in terms of fit and finish, even though the outside is much less radical and more Alphard with a mask on. The biggest fly in the Lexus ointment? It starts at £90k and runs to £113k for the four seater you see here. That's a lot of money for a family car, and probably lends itself more to the VIP transport side of things.

So where do we stand? Well, these cars are slightly odd in the UK, and that makes them infinitely interesting. Old money might still prefer its luxury cars saloon shaped, but there's a lot to be said for embracing a vehicle that's very, very good at a specific purpose. And the Li Auto Mega, and other Chinese luxe MPVs from the likes of Zeekr and Denza, are exceptional at family style luxury. Embrace the niche, weird electric MPVs for the win.

LI AUTO MEGA

Price: £58,000
(in China, not available in UK)
Powertrain: two e-motors,
536bhp, 400lb ft
Transmission: 1spd auto, AWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 5.5secs, 112mph
Battery/range: 102.7kWh/357 miles
Weight: 2,785kg

LEXUS LM350h

Price: £113,030 (for Takumi grade,
starts at £90,030 for seven-seater)
Powertrain: 2.5-litre 4cyl hybrid,
245bhp, 176lb ft
Transmission: e-CVT, FWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 9.1secs, 118mph
Economy: 42.1mpg, 152g/km CO_2
Weight: 2,295kg

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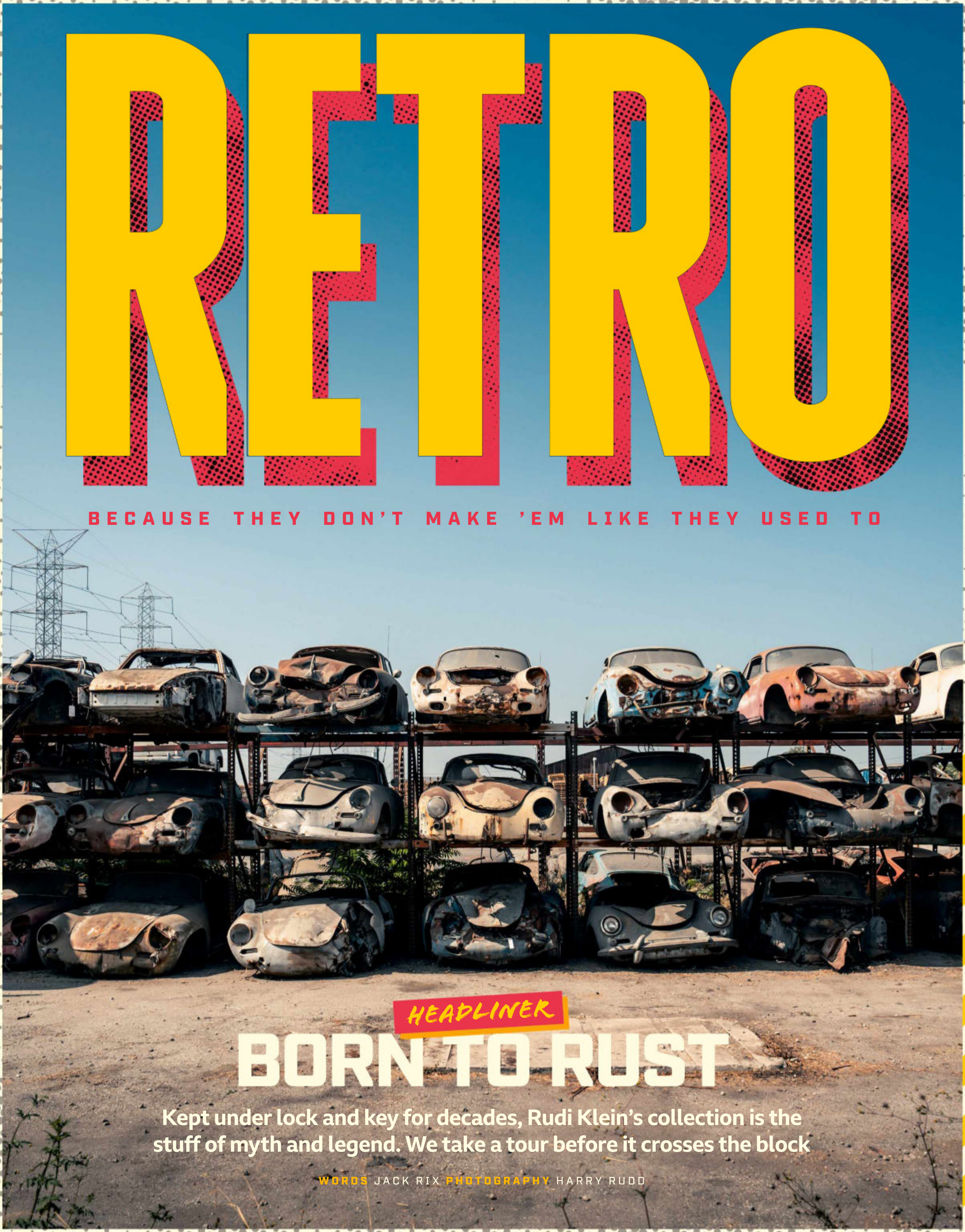


RETRO

BECAUSE THEY DON'T MAKE 'EM LIKE THEY USED TO

HEADLINER

BORN TO RUST

Kept under lock and key for decades, Rudi Klein's collection is the stuff of myth and legend. We take a tour before it crosses the block

WORDS JACK RIX **PHOTOGRAPHY** HARRY RUDD

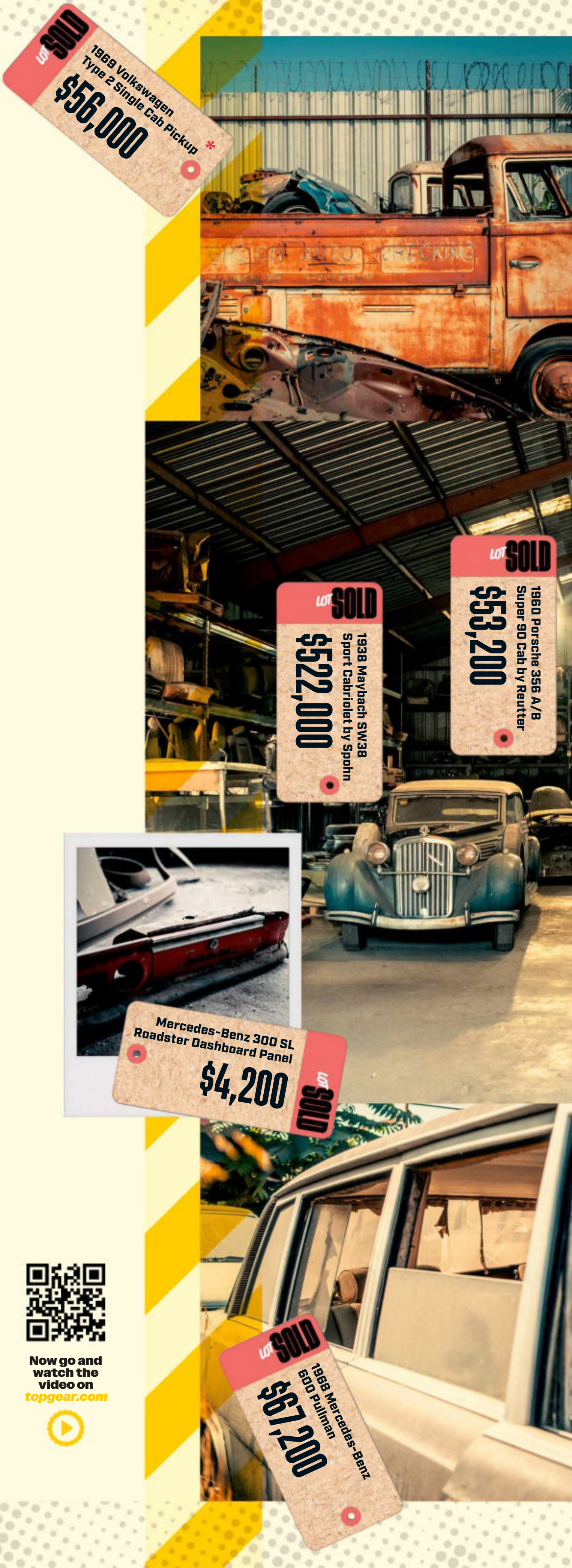
What is it about junkyards that's so magnetic?

Apart from all the ferrous metal. Probably the hope you're going to stumble across some matching numbers Ferrari that everyone else has missed or forgotten about and make your fortune, when in reality the best you'll do is trip over a smashed wing mirror from a Vauxhall Corsa. But what if I told you there was a place in south Los Angeles, a modest lot where everywhere you looked and every dust sheet you lifted revealed another classic car wonder, in some cases worth millions? We're talking about the Disneyland of barn finds, and we had the chance to explore it before the collection was sold at auction.

The collection belonged to Rudi Klein, a German businessman who moved to the US in the 1950s, and figured out if he got his hands on wrecked exotic European cars before they became rare and highly sought after, he'd have a treasure trove of spare parts to keep other exotics going. Business boomed, so he started treating himself to some special stuff that wasn't for breaking, and kept it in this walled and guarded junkyard that envelops an entire block in one of LA's less salubrious areas. The business was known as Porche Foreign Auto Wrecking (Porsche deliberately spelled without the S to keep lawyers happy), and Rudi – who died in 2001 – was famous for not letting the public or journalists in. He also disliked selling anything back to manufacturers for restoration, so a lot of the cars were left to rot.

On 26 October 2024 around 180 cars crossed the block, right here in the yard. RM Sotheby's was given the task of cataloguing the collection that included rare gems like the 1956 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL 'Alloy' Gullwing (one of just 29 built and the only one delivered with black paint, sold for $9.36m), 1968 Lambo Miura P400 (sold for almost triple its estimate at $1.33m) and a wonderfully bizarre 1969 VW Type 2 Single Cab Pickup with the front chassis section of a 1968 Lambo Miura P400 sat on the back (snapped up for $56k).

But focusing on just these jewels doesn't do justice to this Aladdin's cave – a series of vast sheds filled with windscreens, gearboxes, seats, doors, wheel trims, bonnet mascots, instrument clusters and more. Upstairs we find a room filled with new/old stock ranging from Porsche 356 headlight bulbs to Merc 300SL piston rings, all pristine and in original packaging. It's a hugely valuable hoard, as the sold prices on these pages describe, but really it's the story of one man's life in all its dusty, obsessive glory.


LOT SOLD
1969 Volkswagen Type 2 Single Cab Pickup *
$56,000
LOT SOLD
1960 Porsche 356 A/B Super 90 Cab by Reutter
$53,200
LOT SOLD
1938 Maybach SW38 Sport Cabriolet by Spohn
$522,000
Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Roadster Dashboard Panel
$4,200
LOT SOLD
LOT SOLD
1968 Mercedes-Benz 600 Pullman
$67,200

* Comes with 1968 Lamborghini Miura P400 (front chassis section and clip only)

Now go and watch the video on topgear.com

1964 Iso Grifo A3/L Spider Prototype by Bertone

$1.9m

LOT SOLD

Swear I parked round here... ah, there it is, buried under 23 Porsche 356s

LOT SOLD

1968 Mercedes-Benz 600 Sedan

$19,040

LOT SOLD

1956 Facel Vega FV2 Cabriolet Conversion

$32,480

LOT SOLD

1957 BMW 503 Series I Cabriolet

$156,800

LOT SOLD

1939 Maybach SW38 'Ponton-Sport' Cabriolet

$100,800

LOT SOLD

1966 Iso Grifo Series I by Bertone

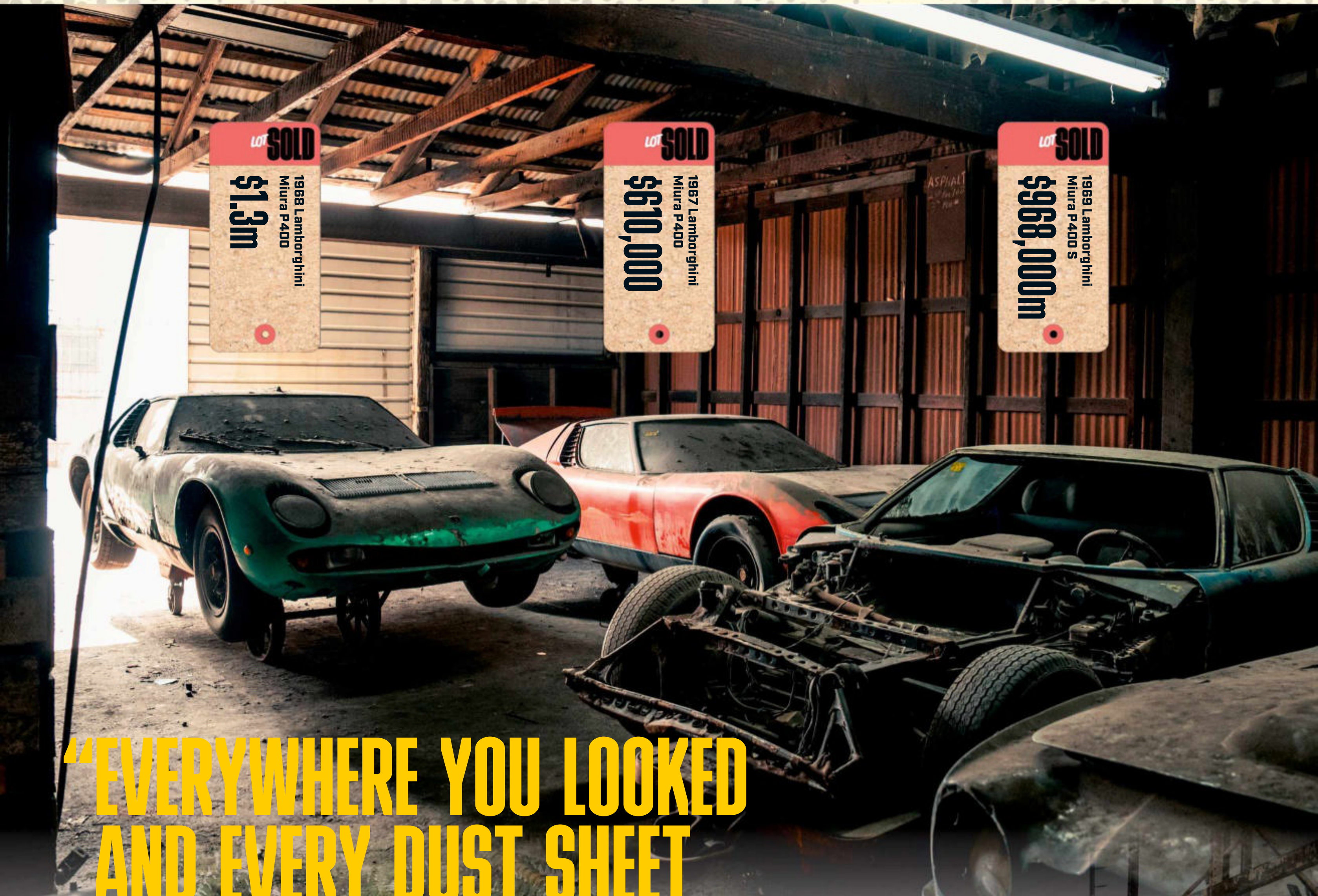
$162,400

LOT SOLD

1983 Audi Quattro

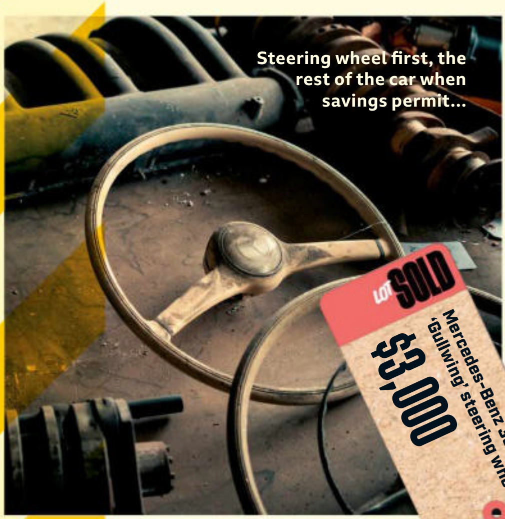
$5,040

A bit like Kwik Fit, except Rudi always had the part in stock


LOT SOLD
1968 Lamborghini Miura P400
$1.3m
LOT SOLD
1967 Lamborghini Miura P400
$610,000
LOT SOLD
1969 Lamborghini Miura P400 S
$968,000m

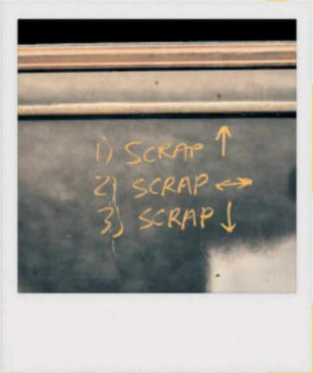
"EVERYWHERE YOU LOOKED AND EVERY DUST SHEET YOU LIFTED REVEALED ANOTHER WONDER"

LOT SOLD
1972 Ferrari 365 GTC/4
$106,400



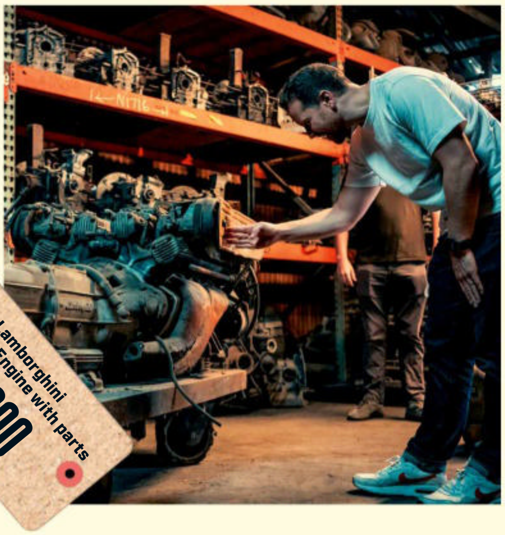
Steering wheel first, the rest of the car when savings permit…

LOT SOLD
Mercedes-Benz 300 SL 'Gullwing' steering wheel
$3,000



1) SCRAP ↑
2) SCRAP ↔
3) SCRAP ↓

MIURA S ENGINE Nº 30452
LOT SOLD
1970 Lamborghini Miura S Engine with parts
$216,000



LOT SOLD
1957 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Roadster
$1.2m

Credit where credit's due, Rudi was a stickler for neat parking

BBC
CLARKSON EVERY MONTH
TopGear
SUMMER
Supercar
FESTIVAL
No mud, no camping, no stinking khazis... no Jay-Z
MAIN STAGE
GALLARDO LP560
NEW ASTON V8 * CATERHAM R500
MASERATI GT S * KOENIGSEGGGGG CCX
2009 FERRARI 612 * 'NEW' ASTON MARTIN DB9
FERRARI 430 SCUDERIA not FEATURING KIMI RAIKKONEN
HEADLINING
The 3 Veyrons

IMAGES: ALAMY

The big picture

THREE VEYRONS IN ABU DHABI

This picture tells the story of some world class arse covering. The plan was a Veyron versus Koenigsegg showdown – a Bugatti was successfully borrowed, the Swede flown in. And then the 'Segg had a terminal fuelling issue and the st hit the fan. Luckily, they're fond of supercars in Abu Dhabi, so the idea of acquiring another two Veyrons was mooted... cue the spectacle of three of the world's rarest cars in a 150mph convoy. As plan Bs go, this wasn't a bad one.**

WORDS: JACK RIX PHOTOGRAPHY: LEE BRIMBLE

REMEMBERING
RETRO GAMING
THE CLASSICS

#67

Motorhead

PLAYSTATION/PC, 1998

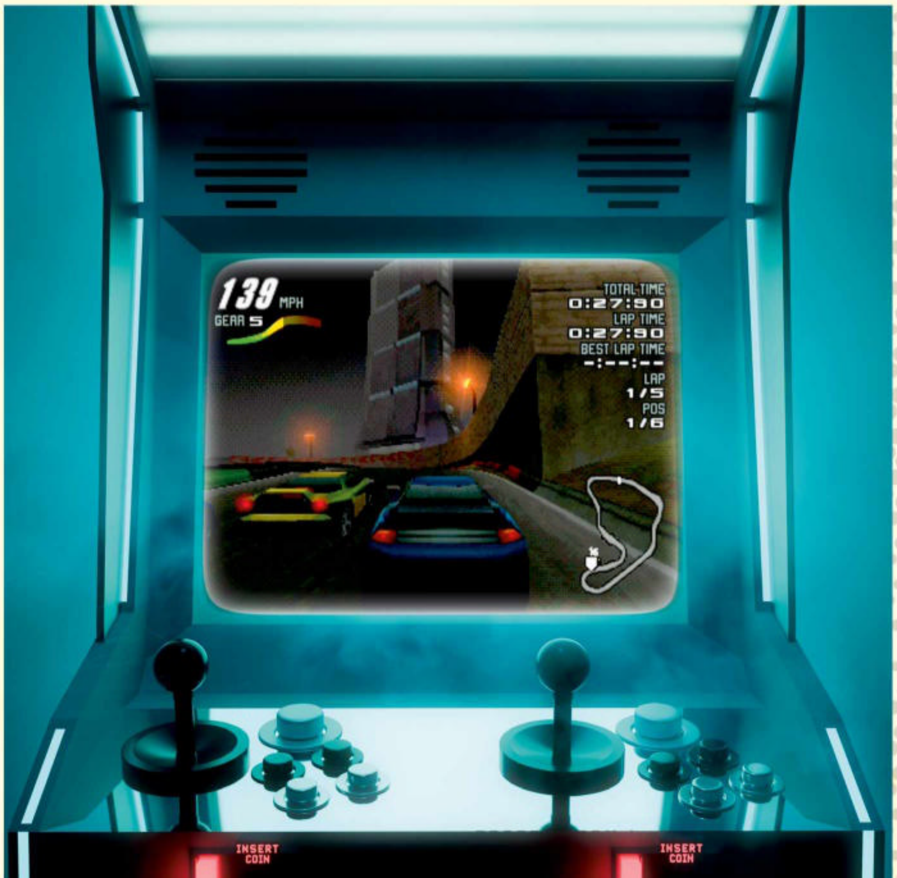
You have to feel for the developers of sci-fi racing game *Motorhead*. They clearly tried very hard back in the late 1990s to conjure the most bleak, dystopian future they could imagine. The game is grim, gloomy and industrial, the sort of motor racing that Harrison Ford's character in *Blade Runner* would watch to unwind after blowing the head off a replicant. Little did those developers know that here in the actual 21st century *Motorhead* would end up as a hopeful vision of a future where the combustion engine remains relevant.

Whatever, *Motorhead's* sci-fi aesthetic was the most striking thing about it. This really did look like racing as directed by Ridley Scott circa 1982. The tracks swooped past imposing concrete buildings, streetlights struggled to cut through the ambient smog and you'd hear thumping music as you whipped by a neon soaked nightclub. The only thing missing was a noodle bar.

But where its more famous stablemate *Wipeout* eschewed wheels entirely, *Motorhead* boasted sim-inspired driving physics. Mastering that handling was vital, because the game had exacting difficulty and one small error would usually be enough to cost you the race. Still, at least you didn't have to worry about a homing missile up the exhaust pipe.

In an interesting technical quirk, the game offered the option to increase the fluidity of the graphics at the cost of having fewer opponents. It was a neat party trick, but the game played so brilliantly at the lower frame rate, it was best used as a way to impress your mates.

And to address the elephant in the room, the soundtrack was all trance and electronica rather than a throat shredding performance by Lemmy and co. That's got to have confused at least one 1990s heavy metal fan back in the day... **MIKE CHANNELL**



IMAGES: GETTY

CALIBRA TURBO
P810 FDB

DO/~~DON'T~~ MEET YOUR HEROES

VAUXHALL CALIBRA TURBO (1992)

£27,500 (when new)

2.0T 4cyl	204 bhp	0–62 mph 6.4 secs	34 mpg	1,380 kg

HERO Gorgeous looks, great engine

ZERO Handling could be better, uninspiring dash

SHALL I COMPARE THEE TO A SUMMER'S day? Probably not, because my old 16V Calibra never really liked summer days. Overheated, y'see, and warm coolant's uniquely terrifying perfume has left a permanent mental scar.

Though while it was parked up waiting to cool off, mine eye would instead be enthralled by the shape of… a Calibra Turbo 4x4.

The daddy of all Calibras, it has remained a permanent fixture on my 'must buy' list, partly through sentiment and the circumstance of location, but mostly through shape and power.

The first and second intertwined, for I was raised in Luton, worked at Vauxhall, and came of age during the Calibra's emergence. Where thou art, therefore, is the world itself.

The third? There's witchcraft in its shape. Here we have some of Vauxhall's – if not the entire 1990s' – prettiest lines. Lines its maker christened as his very finest. Lines which, if launched today, would still look fresh.

The turbocharged 2.0-litre four pot sitting proudly in the Calibra's gargantuan engine bay was raucous rather than honey smooth, but it packed a punch. It made 204bhp and 207lb ft of torque, which back in 1992 was mammoth.

It also had a proper 4WD system – front biased but grippy – and a 6spd manual box, to allow a 0–60mph time of 6.4secs. Consider that an E36 3.0-litre M3 – launched in 1992 also – did that in around 5.6secs. Only eight tenths slower, which against a race bred BMW isn't too bad.

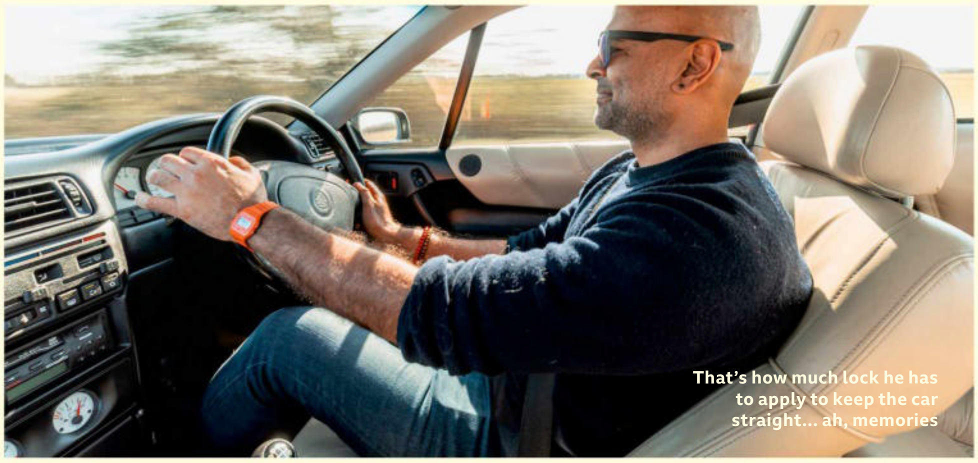
Is fast though. Even today, where time has dulled most things and even rose tinted glasses begin to rust. Not here though, because sinking into the armchair of this gloriously maintained, gloriously original and achingly pretty Calibra Turbo sends a tidal wave of cosy, fuzzy memories cascading in. It's like I've been transported back a quarter of a century and anything is possible.

Including that 0–60mph time. A supermini can peel off a 6.4secs time in 2025's hyper-inflated world, but that's strained pace – this feels fast because it feels natural, (reasonably) linear, and solid. Sounds just like I thought it might, too. There's a definite 'turbo just kicked in yo' moment, but on the whole you just point, hold down the X button, and enjoy the ride.

A good ride, even with its lowered Bilstein dampers and shorter springs. The Calibra's setup doesn't feel entirely tied down – its Cavalier roots betraying those looks – but nor is it loose;

WORDS: VIJAY PATTNI **PHOTOS:** JONNY FLEETWOOD
WITH THANKS TO: RICHARD GIBSON FOR THE LOAN OF THE VAUXHALL CALIBRA TURBO

“HERE WE HAVE SOME OF VAUXHALL’S – IF NOT THE 1990S’ – PRETTIEST LINES”



That’s how much lock he has to apply to keep the car straight… ah, memories

in 2025’s hyper-firm world, it feels more relaxed. Gearbox brings back good memories: a positive action, even if it’s positioned a little too far back.

This particular car is owned by Richard Gibson, and it’s a Limited Edition – the fourth of only 51 built – which means it’s one of the last that rolled off the line. It’s also got a great story.

One afternoon, Gibson saw it being driven by its previous owner – a former Vauxhall employee gifted the Cali as a retirement gift – did a U-turn and followed him into a supermarket car park to make him an offer on the spot.

The owner declined, but Gibson persisted, left his number, and later received a call after the owner had changed his mind. Gibson bought it instantly “for a pittance” and has never looked back. “They look like a modern day classic,” he said, “and everyone wants the Turbo.”

Agreed. It’s comfortable. It’s fast. If you take care of it, it won’t cause you problems – Gibson’s never had the Calibra Turbo’s dreaded transfer box issues because he’s been sensible and diligent with his maintenance. The engine’s fairly bulletproof too.

And for Gibson at least, he would not wish for any companion in the world but his Calibra Turbo. “I’ll never get rid of it,” he said.

DRIVEN

74 EAF
YC24 BRV

HEAD TO HEAD

ELECTRIC ESTATES

See, it's not all SUVs in the electric era. Audi's new A6 Avant e-tron goes toe to toe with BMW's i5 Touring

WORDS OLLIE KEW **PHOTOGRAPHY** JONNY FLEETWOOD

Close run battle, this. And that's not a surprise, is it? For all recorded time, comparing big German bizniz barges has been like agonising over shades of off-white in the paint aisle. The BMW 530d M Sport Almond Ivory… or the Audi A6 S line Elephant's Breath? Sorry love, better grab a tester pot to be sure we don't prefer Mercedes E-Class AMG Line Waiting Room Beige.

But it *is* incredible how equal the latest evolutions of A6 and 5-Series are, because here we have the two polar opposite views the car industry is currently arguing over – how to build an EV.

Option one: BMW's one size fits all masterplan. Build a car to accept every powertrain choice going. Into this immense, awkwardly angular bodyshell, BMW stuffs petrol and diesel engines, hybrids, or this totally electric solution, the i5.

That's why you sit a little bit higher than you're used to in a 5-Series – because about 300kg of cells need room to lie down. It's why this car is punctured by grilles – in case this body contained an engine. It also explains the XXL overhangs and traditionally long bonnet (with no front boot stowage beneath it, meaning the charging cables get in the way of shopping and knot the dog's legs). And the 'classic' plutobarge look means the aero is none too clever.

So there are compromises, and not just for the i5. All 5-Series (including the infamously porky M5) are now stupidly heavy, because the basic structure has been armour plated in case it needs to carry monumental e-flab.

But the upshot is BMW only has to build one car called a 5-Series. The factory is happy, the badging department is pleased, and you don't need a treasure map to negotiate BMW's website.

Option two: Audi will soon build two entirely unrelated A6s. One is this car: the electric only A6 e-tron. The other is the new, um, A6, a combustion or hybrid powered car on an entirely different chassis. The two cars will both be called A6 but won't share a single body panel.

Still, the advantages to dreaming up a fresh platform are obvious. The A6 e-tron Avant isn't just slipperier than the BMW. It's one of the world's most aerodynamically efficient production cars, because it's not full of holes, the underbody is flatter than morale at Old Trafford, and it lacks door mirrors. We'll come back to those.

Besides leaving the air neat and tidy, the A6's bespoke foundations unlock other useful advantages. Yes, it's actually 5kg heavier than the 5er, but it carries 17 per cent more battery capacity in a car that's usefully smaller overall.

No surprise then that there's a heap more range. BMW quotes 327 miles from the industry lab test,

WHAT ABOUT THESE?

PORSCHE TAYCAN SPORT TURISMO

The RWD Porsche e-wagon. A gorgeous drive but where did all the rear space go? Range on a good day is 350 miles

£87,300

VW ID.7 TOURER

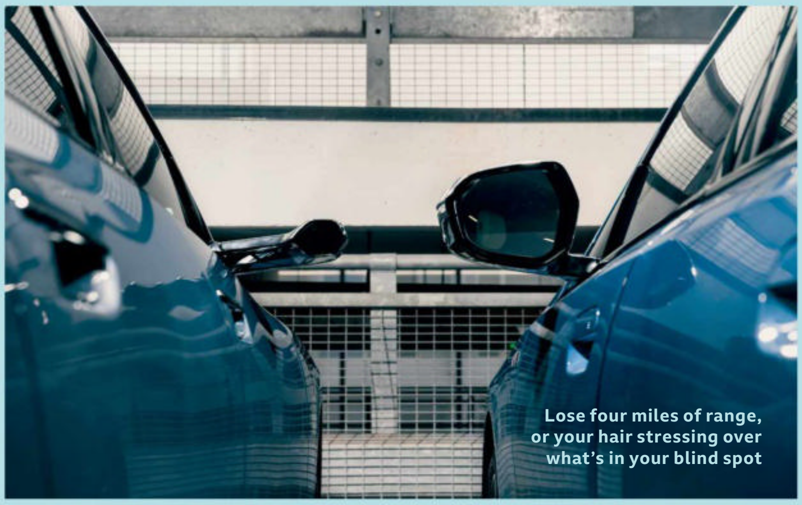
By far VW's best EV. Ignore pointless GTX and get into a Pro S trim with 400+ miles of range for under £60k

£56,170

VAUXHALL ASTRA SPORT TOURER ELECTRIC

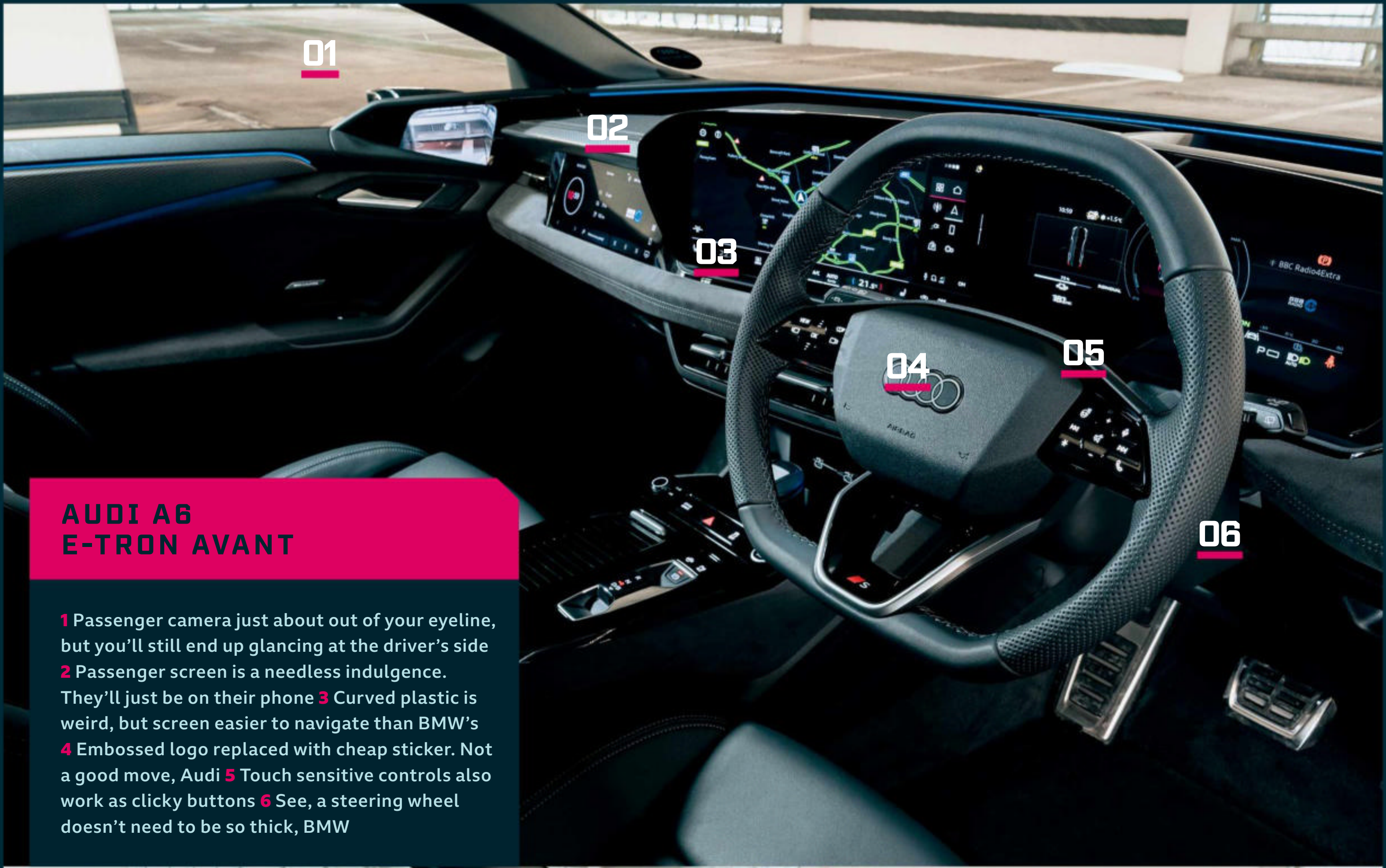
Already running out of electric estate choices. Vauxhall's top spec effort offers up 516 litres and 251 miles

£39,820



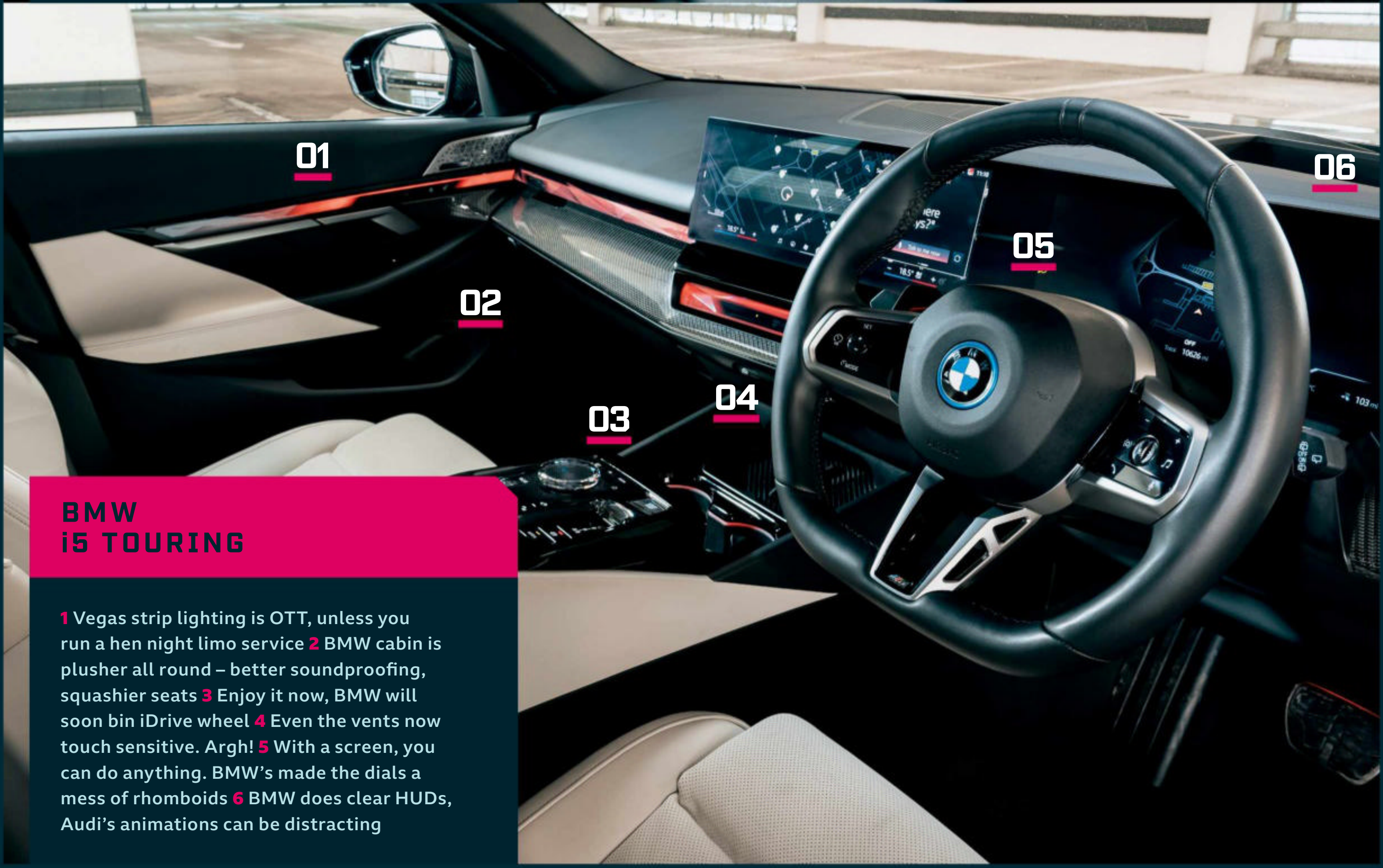
Lose four miles of range, or your hair stressing over what's in your blind spot

“BMW'S MASTERPLAN IS TO BUILD A CAR TO ACCEPT EVERY POWERTRAIN CHOICE GOING”



AUDI A6 E-TRON AVANT

1 Passenger camera just about out of your eyeline, but you'll still end up glancing at the driver's side **2** Passenger screen is a needless indulgence. They'll just be on their phone **3** Curved plastic is weird, but screen easier to navigate than BMW's **4** Embossed logo replaced with cheap sticker. Not a good move, Audi **5** Touch sensitive controls also work as clicky buttons **6** See, a steering wheel doesn't need to be so thick, BMW



BMW i5 TOURING

1 Vegas strip lighting is OTT, unless you run a hen night limo service **2** BMW cabin is plusher all round – better soundproofing, squashier seats **3** Enjoy it now, BMW will soon bin iDrive wheel **4** Even the vents now touch sensitive. Argh! **5** With a screen, you can do anything. BMW's made the dials a mess of rhomboids **6** BMW does clear HUDs, Audi's animations can be distracting but we're more forensic. This car has been our *TG* Garage long termer for eight months and 10,000 miles. It averaged 310 miles to a charge back in the summer. Even the least efficient A6 e-tron – this Launch Edition on 21in wheels – claims over 400 miles. The Sport model reckons it'll outrun the i5 by a good 100 miles.

So far, so 'we told you so' by Audi then. An electric car is best when it's built to be electric from the wheels up. And the virtuous circle keeps on spinning, running four rings around the bloated i5.

It's not just your eyes, either. The A6 is indeed noticeably shorter (if marginally wider) – easier to park and place – yet passengers in the second row enjoy more space to lounge in. Opening the back doors of a 5-Series is like going to a flat viewing after studying the cheeky fisheye lens photos posted by the estate agent. Hang about, it looked ginormous on the outside. Where's all the space gone?

But the weather (as motorsport commentators gleefully point out) is a great leveller. It's bitingly cold when A6 meets i5. And you know what? Both offer up 250 miles. A colleague spends longer with the Audi and coaxes it to 2.8 miles per kWh over 270 miles, but the BMW avenges its smaller battery by being more efficient overall, effortlessly managing three miles per kWh. And though the i5 loses the space wars for 'people', it wins it back on 'stuff'. It has the marginally bigger boot and even a slightly faster electric tailgate.

Just as things are looking up for the i5, let's roll price into the equation. An i5 Touring squeaks in at under £70k, but Brits will almost always tick the M Sport box as seen here, taking the price north of £76k, or £1,100 a month on the BMW finance calculator. A6 e-tron Avants are a few grand cheaper to begin with, while the equivalently thrusting S line trim is £68,605.

This particular car is a spec laden Launch Edition unhelpfully no longer listed on Audi's website, but here to give you a good idea what an A6 looks like with every option optioned. Even at an eye watering £87k, it's £6k less than BMW charges for this bell and whistle festooned i5. At this point we ought to cover depreciation, but the BBC doesn't allow depictions of cruelty and torture in its magazines.

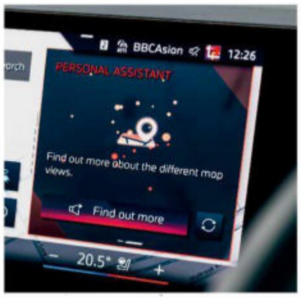
So we'll drive them instead, just as soon as the BMW's 87-point turned its way out of the multistorey. And nicked a wheel on the down ramp kerb in the process. My fault. Or was it? For all its screens, cameras, sensors, bongs, alerts and assists, the sheer bulk of the i5 simply isn't compatible with quite a lot of Britain. Over 5m long, 2m wide over the mirrors. Rear steer and 360º cameras help, but the Audi is wieldier and less stressful at each end of your journey.

Partly that's because you sit up in the roof rafters rather than (relatively) down on the cat's eyes. What Audi's done here is dress up a crossover driving position in an estate car suit. That black fillet breaking up the thickset doors and 21in rims does a convincing job of hiding the fact an A6 driver is no longer eye to eye with other pilots of German business expresses. They're riding high and mighty with the Evoques and Qashqais. Easier to judge your surroundings from up there.

Or it would be, if Audi hadn't wilfully sabotaged itself with yet more virtual mirrors. OK, we've been here before with the old e-tron SUV and in various Hyundais and Lexuses, so the problems with this tech are fairly well established. The displays aren't clear enough in dark or wet conditions (gawd help you if it's both), there's no depth perception so telling at a glance how quickly that car in the next lane is closing is nigh on impossible, and because the camera is fixed, you can't change your perspective by bobbing or weaving your head. You need to swipe at the screen to muddle where the lens is pointing. It's a faff.

ITS ALL IN THE DETAILS

03
eDrive40



1 Like i5, A6 has simple one click gear selector for max regen B mode **2** Warning: objects in screens are definitely closer than they appear **3** Remember when BMW badges made sense? No, neither do we. **4** Childish boost paddle makes overtaking just that bit more exciting, mainly due to 'whoosh' warp soundtrack **5** Light up badges. As if Audi drivers needed another reason to be publicly loathed

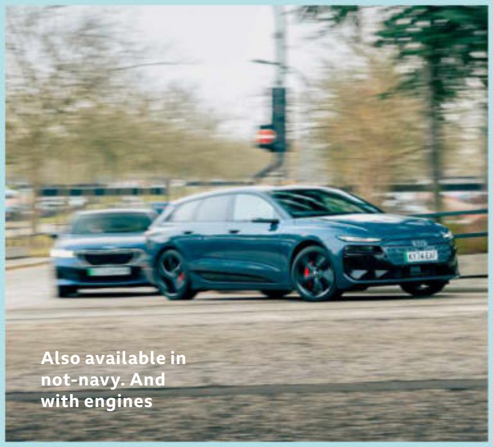
SPECIFICATIONS

	WINNER BMW i5 TOURING M SPORT	AUDI A6 E-TRON AVANT LAUNCH EDITION	TESTER'S NOTES
PRICE	£76,355 OTR (£93,395 as tested)	£87,350 OTR (£87,350 as tested)	
POWERTRAIN	Single e-motor, 81.2kWh	Single e-motor, 94.9kWh	*A year longer in development and a bespoke platform gives the Audi a solid lead in battery capacity*
TRANSMISSION	1spd auto, RWD	1spd auto, RWD	*A rear drive Audi wagon? Hell must've frozen over. That'll be bad for the range*
TOTAL POWER	335bhp	362bhp	*Both are swift, but there are M60 and S6 dual motor versions of both if you'd like thrusting pace and a chunk less range*
TOTAL TORQUE	317lb ft	417lb ft	*With another 100 torques the Audi ought to feel a lot meatier, but in reality there's little in it*
0-62mph	6.1secs	5.4secs	*OK, 0.7secs is quite a lot when it comes to 0–62. But the BMW will hardly cause sliproad pileups lumbering in everyone's way*
TOP SPEED	120mph	130mph	*Audi allows its autobahn limiter another 10mph of leeway, presumably because the aero is so much slipperier than the BMW's*
CLAIMED ECONOMY/RANGE	3.5mpkWh, 327 miles	3.7mpkWh, 402 miles	*Worth noting the Launch Edition A6 is a tad worse for range than a boggo S line, which Audi reckons is good for 4.1mpkWh and 435 miles in total*
WEIGHT	2,180kg	2,185kg	*Both are obese for base model rear drivers, but ironic how bespoke platformed Audi is a smidge heavier overall*
BOOTSPACE	570/1,700 litres	502/1,422 litres	*BMW marginally bigger for bootspace, but at least the Audi musters a 27-litre froot under the bonnet to keep a mucky cable in*
VERDICT	*Very big, very expensive, but very much a luxury express as well as a family hauler. We've loved living with it for half a year*	*Cheaper in normal trims, goes faster and further… but not comfy or welcoming enough to pip the composed yet sharp driving i5*	
SCORE	8	8	/10

And despite shifting the screens away from the corners of the pillars and up onto the doors, it's tricky to unlearn the instinct of looking out the window to check the mirror. Ah, whoops, that's a camera. Refocus to inside the door to check screen. Oopsie, there's a 10-tonne truck in my blind spot. Why all this inconvenience and this hefty cost (the digital mirrors are usually a £1,495 option)? According to Audi's wind tunnel boffins, the drag saving is worth four miles of range over a full charge. I think I'd sooner park in the next village and walk.

There are other quibbles. The entire *TopGear* road test team drove the A6 during its stay with us and not one thought the ride was acceptable. Yes, it's wearing 21in rims and our roads are rougher than Hardest Geezer's foot calluses, but there's a tension and restlessness to the A6's ride which gets on your nerves. You'll have read in the previous issue how the car is much more at home on the highways of continental Europe which are cared for like putting greens, but that's cold comfort when the A6 is jouncing down the A6003 and everyone's having their heads tossed around like they're on a moody seaside donkey.

Life in the BMW is calm and cultured. It's a very expensive car, but it has the *feel* of one too, straddling the line between where an executive 5-Series ends and a luxury 7-Series limo begins. It squashes bumps the Audi fidgets over, absorbs imperfections the Audi hosts a conference call about, and generally oozes about like a shooting brake Rolls-Royce Spectre. Once you're on a road it can comfortably fit down. When you tug its bombproof door closed behind you, it seals you off from the outside world so effectively you half expect your ears to pop, as if it's a pressurised cabin in a business jet.


Also available in not-navy. And with engines

Perhaps this is a personal preference thing, but across all the i-kind and e-trons I've driven, BMW's intelligent regen braking is more logical than Audi's paddle adjusted settings. Click the i5 into B mode in town for maximum recuperation and it's a very relaxing one pedal car.

In the very old days, an Audi/BMW faceoff would traditionally alight on the fact the BMW also had steely eyed rear drive chops and was obviously the choice of serious drivers, while the Audi was about as memorable as a Dulux paint chart. The gap is a lot closer these days. For one thing, the Audi's rear wheel drive too. More efficient that way. Back to back, the lower set, slightly more agile BMW was the keener drive, but come on. Two-tonne e-wagons with augmented warp soundtracks hardly scream Sunday morning thrap, right?

Be in no doubt, the Audi's a fine car. Our team preferred its interior screen logic (cameras excepted) and found it easier to manoeuvre. It's spacious, futuristic and has the potential to be a genuine range monster. Probably comfier, less annoying and better value with a more modest spec, too.

But the i5 earns the narrowest of moral victories here, because despite not even being built to be an EV first and foremost, it's the better car to drive, to ride in, to carry things and isn't remotely compromised *enough* to justify building a whole other car as an electric offshoot. So there you have it, carmakers of the world. BMW's been the canary in the coal mine and done you a big favour. Keep building cars you can sell with or without engines. Y'know, just in case electric doesn't end up being the only fuel of the near future.

"THE BMW HAS THE MARGINALLY BIGGER BOOT, AND EVEN A SLIGHTLY FASTER ELECTRIC TAILGATE"

SCAN HERE FOR FULL REVIEWS OF EVERY NEW CAR

THE OVERRUN

Small but perfectly formed reviews. The best of this month's drives

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GTC

£259,500

4.0TT V8 + e-motor	782 bhp	3.4 secs	202 mpg	31 g/km

MAGNIFICENT THING THIS. Roof down you can breeze along, propelled by usefully stout electric drive alone, or in fathomlessly rapid combo with the woofly V8. The ride's soft but well damped, the seats sublime and the cabin decor lavish. Roof up in foul weather, traction is strong and handling handy in the sports mode. Not quite as precise as the GT coupe though, so ease off and enjoy the ride. **PH**

AUDI Q5 2.0 TDI EDITION 1

£56,890

2.0T 4cyl hybrid	201 bhp	7.4 secs	44.1 mpg	168 g/km

YOU COULD ARGUE THE AUDI Q5 didn't need reinventing. It was Audi's bestseller by some way in 2024 despite the MkII arriving in 2016, yet here we are. Headlines are the firm ride on the optional air suspension, smooth and impressive new hybrid petrol and diesel engines, and a less impressive screen filled interior. Top spec Edition 1s even get a 10.9in passenger screen, which comes with free karaoke app. **GP**

6/10

BMW M235 GRAN COUPE

£44,435

FOR The tech is improved, M235 has a bit of character

AGAINST It's not a full blown M car though

THIS IS THE SECOND GENERATION OF BMW'S COMPACT 4DR COUPE, redesigned for additional presence and performance. There's also greater emphasis on digitalisation with enhanced autonomous driving functionality and the obligatory array of assistance systems. Revised suspension, an extra strut brace in the engine bay and on the rear axle plus bigger tyres are part of the M235's dynamics makeover. The 2.0-litre engine makes 296bhp in M235 xDrive form, and while it's punchy enough it's also surprisingly uncouth when you're leaning on it. The 7spd DCT is fine but you need to use the paddles to get the best out of it. Visual upgrades include a reworked grille, newly available with an LED surround, and finished in black. Inside, the touchscreen and latest OS are sophisticated and functional. But this is still a hard car to love. **JB**

2.0T 4cyl	296 bhp	4.9 secs	34.4 mpg	185 g/km

6/10

RENAULT CAPTUR E-TECH HYBRID

£27,995

1.6 4cyl hybrid	143 bhp	10.6 secs	60.1 mpg	105 g/km

RENAULT'S JUNKED THE pre-facelift look for something more akin to the Megane and Scenic. Still looks handsome. Just *different* handsome. The inside's been tidied up (RIP funky orange cloth), with a crisper touchscreen running Google Maps and recycled fabrics replacing leather and chrome. Driveability is still iffy – as feared 'more dynamic ride' just means 'less comfortable'. **JH**

6/10

MERCEDES-AMG GLE 53 HYBRID

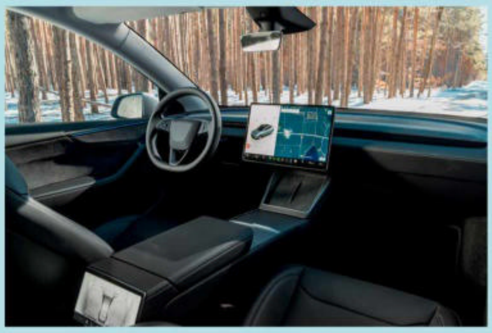
£94,360

3.0T 6cyl + e-motor	537 bhp	4.7 secs	217.3 mpg	30 g/km

THE AMG SPEC 53 HYBRID wasn't meant for the UK, but we love performance SUVs and PHEVs, so it's here anyway with a straight six, e-motor, rock solid ride, five seats and 2.8 tonnes. It does shift and there's almost no roll through corners though. Its 25kWh manages just under 53 miles, after that you're looking at 20mpg and constant barking as the engine cuts and then fires back into life. **GP**

SCAN HERE FOR FULL REVIEWS OF EVERY NEW CAR

8/10



TESLA MODEL Y

£60,990

FOR Much improved in all aspects, notably ride and refinement

AGAINST Looks more generic, backwash from the company owner

75 kWh	507 bhp	4.1 secs	125 mph	353 miles

THIS IS NOT THE DIFFICULT SECOND ALBUM OF car creation, but more addressing the list of largely obvious possible improvements to the Model Y since its launch five years ago. In terms of lifecycle, this is a lateish refresh, but Tesla has actually gone for a deeper cut, creating essentially a new Y, even if a lot of the hardware is shared with the original. It needed to – the Y was the world's bestselling car in 2024, and that's across all powertrains, not just the purely electrically motivated. In a world obsessed with the new, the Model Y needed to move on.

And it has. The most obvious stuff includes new treatments for front and rear bumpers, new wheels, a new light bar on the front (the headlights sit underneath), a changed profile with a vestigial ducktail and a cute rear light bar that's actually viewed indirectly: it's tucked up underneath a rear lip and reflects off a surface on the back of the car. There are also interior tweaks and engineering changes related to suspension and efficiency, as well as aerodynamics. It's not just a styling exercise.

As mentioned, the motors, batteries and basic bits are pretty much the same as the outgoing 'legacy' Model Y, with a gamut of efficiency and aero improvements accruing into solid gains. So it's more efficient, goes further on a charge and should be quieter. Which is kind of par for the course with subsequent generations of EVs. But the big news is really the fact that the Model Y has addressed the criticisms of the old one, in that it was quite noisy and stiff kneed.

The result – along with quite the list of more minor tweaks – is a car that's night and day better than the old one. More attention's been lavished on general rigidity, damping and springs, better isolation and noise reduction. So the Model Y is quieter and more forgiving – exactly what you need from a family car. It's not the most precise to drive, but feels more luxurious and expensive. All because it rides with greater sophistication and clonks through potholes less, if at all.

The now slower steering is also better – not because it's laser precise, but because it's calm and progressive, and the whole car brooks no surprises. Owners will look for consistent grip and reliable reactions, rather than lairy oversteer or aggressive turn in that makes a car feel 'sporty' but also puts your pets/children into compromising positions.

The only issue is that where it was once a good distance from the competition, it's now just about keeping ahead, the initial surprise and delight has waned. It's more modern, but it looks like a lot of other electric SUVs, and there's no badge on the front to tell you what it is. There's still Tesla's Supercharger network to back up the ownership prospect, and buyers won't be disappointed with the hardware or experience. A decent evolution rather than the revolution that might be needed next time. **TF**

MINI COOPER CONVERTIBLE S

£31,570

2.0T 4cyl	201 bhp	6.9 secs	42.8 mpg	148 g/km

MINI REGARDS THIS AS THE FOURTH GEN Convertible – only the doors are carried over. There's a revised front grille and circular LED headlights, though the three stage canvas roof is the same. Power's from a 2.0-litre turbo four, making 201bhp in the mid-ranking Cooper S. It's more refined than before and the £3,500 Sport pack sharpens things further. It also gets the latest interior with its multifunction OLED screen and tactile textile trim. Nice. **JB**

SUBARU FORESTER LIMITED

£42,995

2.0 4cyl	136 bhp	12.2 secs	34.9 mpg	183 g/km

FOR GENERATIONS, THE FORESTER DRIFTED from fashion, but the new one looks quite comely. It's spacious, comfortable, safe, robust and capable – trustworthy in all the important ways. It's the sort of thing that'd come to be seen as a member of the family. The flat four has no turbo, and despite e-assistance it's a bit of a slug. Even odder, it's thirsty too, bringing a high CO_2 rating. Private buyers only, then. Rural ones. It would guarantee to get them there... eventually. **PH**

HYUNDAI IONIQ 9

£65,000 (est)

FOR Looks cool, comfort, practicality, huge battery = decent range

AGAINST Interior trim could be classier, might not fit on UK B roads

110 kWh	308 bhp	6.7 secs	124 mph	385 miles

HYUNDAI'S SLIGHTLY RANDOM ELECTRIC strategy has gone from Ioniq 5 to 6 and now to 9. This time it's stretching the brand's bandwidth upmarket to tackle the Volvo EX90. With prices rumoured to begin at £65k, it undercuts the Swede dramatically.

Not that the South Korean giant needs to play the VFM card. A seven seat electric SUV, the Ioniq 9 also outflanks its Kia EV9 cousin by packing a bigger 110kWh battery for superior range – 385 miles versus 349. Both companies have stolen design leadership from Western rivals, and the Ioniq 9's 'aerosthetic' approach builds on its smaller siblings' key features – the parametric pixel lights and cleverly radiused surfaces – into an overall form that's less 'look at me' than the blocky Kia. We're deducting a few points for the wheelarch eyebrows, though we love the tapered rear. Hyundai claims a drag coefficient of just 0.259, amazing for something of this shape and size. There's no roof antenna: the windscreen, tailgate glass and instrument panel cover off all the connectivity.

This is a highly accomplished machine. It uses Hyundai's E-GMP platform, so it has 800V ultra fast charging capability, going from 10 to 80 per cent in 24 minutes if you can find a 350kW charger. The UK model lineup is being finalised, but we tried the Long Range AWD version which has a 214bhp motor on the rear axle and a 94bhp one up front. Given its size and 2.7 tonne weight, it's no rocketship, but if you need to get to 62mph any faster than the 6.7secs it takes here, look elsewhere, weirdo.

More relevant is the Ioniq 9's relaxed gait, plush ride even on 21s and overall refinement. Double glazed windows, active noise cancelling and tyre foam sound deadening all underline its luxury remit. Clever tech means its mass is well checked, with torque vectoring to sharpen handling and a lateral stability system to enhance high speed behaviour.

There are gently curved twin 12in displays, and all three rows are comfortable. Graphics and touchscreen functionality are fine, and climate gets physical controls. A slidable 'universal island' centre console adds interior practicality, and there's V2L capability too.

Another winner, then. **JB**

GARAGE

INCLUDING

ASTON DB12 · BMW M5 · MG CYBERSTER · VW ID.7 · BMW M135 · PEUGEOT 3008 · SKODA KODIAQ · RICCI'S GARAGE · LAND ROVER DEFENDER 130 · DACIA DUSTER · CUORA BORN

ENGINE
ASTON MARTIN
START
STOP

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TOPGEAR.COM
FOR EXTENDED *TG* GARAGE REPORTS, AND TO EXPLORE THE ARCHIVE

GOODBYE

What's an RS7 like as a cross continent cruise missile?

AUDI RS7 PERFORMANCE

£116,200 OTR/£122,250 as tested/£1,490 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: Why is our new Audi RS7 Performance such a hit with the public?

DRIVER: *ROWAN HORNCASTLE*

IF YOU READ LAST MONTH'S MAG, you would have seen that Ollie Marriage and I tagged onto Team GB's slalom Kitzbühel effort in an Audi A6 e-tron. Well, for that shoot we needed a support car. So I thought I'd fulfil that role, then do a bit of skiing off the back of it before heading to the wonderfully eclectic FAT ice race the following weekend in Zell am See. A 2,000 mile tour that would show what the RS7 is like as a cross continent cruise missile. So I filled the RS7 with bags, many Head skis, a SeaSucker rack and posted it into the first Thursday morning train LeShuttle could serve up to be in Kitz for dinner. Proper grand touring.

The RS7 is a great cruiser. The seats give no issues and you sit low in the car. And where contemporary Audi interiors are getting overly complicated, screen filled and (if the A6 e-tron is anything to go by) cheaper in quality, the RS7's touchpoints feel rugged, like they're honed from stone and wrapped in leather. After six months, the cabin and seats now feel more like well worn lederhosen – familiar, durable, and surprisingly supple. The steering wheel is thick but not cumbersome whereas the e-tron's feels skeletal and light in comparison. There are also lots of scratchy plastics and menus to get lost in the new A6.

But the RS7 kept impressing, looking effortlessly thuggish in ski resorts, especially with a pair of posh Porsche x Head skis on top. Having lived with the RS7 for 12,000 miles and put it through its paces in every regard, my respect for it has grown exceptionally. I thought it would be inert and boring at times, but it's been the opposite – growing in personality and voice as the miles have gone on. It got some minor squeaks behind the dual screens (which were sorted out) but it feels like it'd last forever, like German cars of old.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 3996cc TT V8, AWD

PERFORMANCE: 621bhp, 627lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.4secs, 174mph

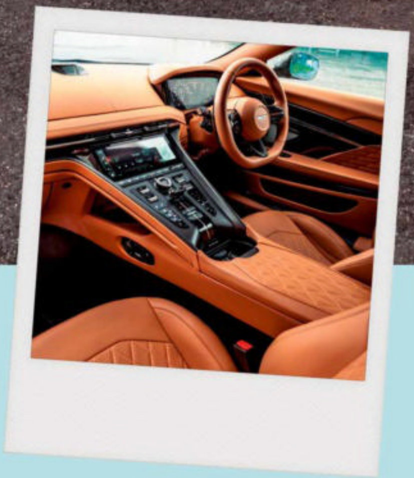
KERBWEIGHT: 2,065kg

ECONOMY: 22.6mpg, 283g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 12,013 **OUR MPG** 21.0

HELLO

The "world's first super tourer" is ours for a few months



ASTON MARTIN DB12

£185,000 OTR/£240,000 as tested/£1,849 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: Aston's GTs are increasingly sporty: too much for the daily grind?

DRIVER: ROWAN HORNCASTLE

WELCOME TO *TG* GARAGE'S LATEST addition, an Aston Martin Racing Green over Oxford Tan DB12. This is the model that replaced the DB11, which was only around for seven years, but things move fast nowadays. Including this DB12, thanks to a twin turbo 4.0-litre AMG derived V8 that develops 671bhp (a 150bhp uplift!) and 590lb ft, good for a 3.6 second 0–62mph sprint before going on to 202mph.

But what spec are we dealing with? A gorgeous one, that's what. We've obviously got green over tan, paired with 21in multispoke forged wheels finished in Satin Black. Behind the wheels are optional carbon brakes. There are carbon fibre accents up front which look fit for a fight with a high kerb and a panoramic roof that bathes light into a cabin featuring Bridge of Weir hides, flawless stitching, carbon twill, dark chrome, optional 16-way adjustable heated/ventilated seats and steering wheel heating. Oh, and there's also the Bowers & Wilkins 15-speaker stereo. But one of the speakers is already rattling.

The interior is a massive improvement on the DB11 and deserves its own comprehensive update. But the trim materials, upholstery, and switchgear feel fabulously expensive. But, more importantly, it finally has a touchscreen. A trend-bucking anamorphic letterbox touchscreen which feels both cinematic and simplified.

All of this comes at a price though. A hefty one. Base models start at £185k, but ours with all its options is £240k, £55k on top. But remember, the DB12 is playing in the big leagues, competing against the Bentley Continental GT in the luxury stakes and the Porsche 911 Turbo S and Ferrari Roma in the performance stakes. Where it lands, we'll find out. But one thing's for certain — it feels extraordinarily special already.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 3982cc twin turbo V8, RWD

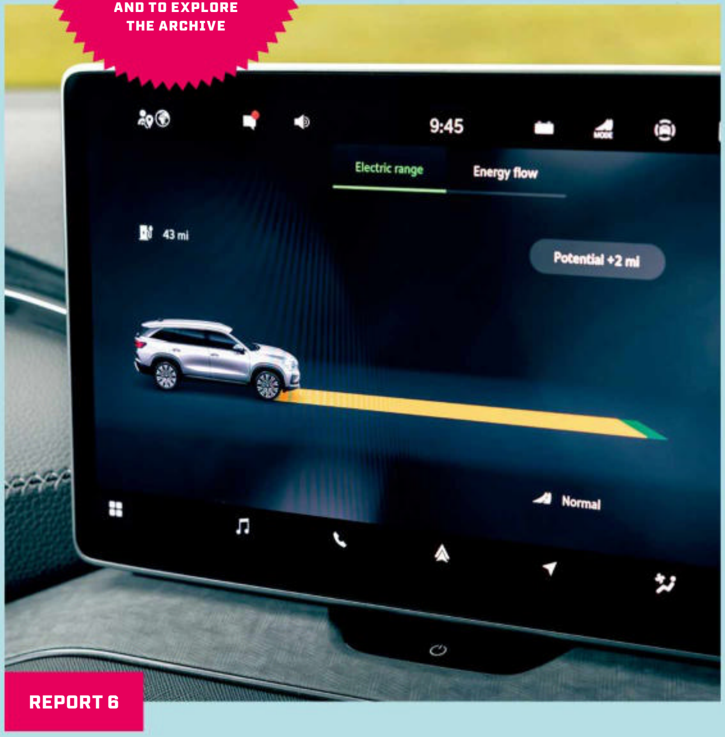
PERFORMANCE: 671bhp, 590lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.6secs, 202mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,685kg

ECONOMY: 23.2mpg, 278g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 3,682 **OUR MPG** 21.7

GO TO
FOR EXTENDED *TG* GARAGE REPORTS, AND TO EXPLORE THE ARCHIVE



REPORT 6

SKODA KODIAQ iV SE L

£44,635 OTR/£47,960 as tested/£516 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: All the car your family will ever need – but will you want for more?

DRIVER: *BEN PULMAN*

ALTHOUGH A PHEV CAN BE THE best of both combustion and electric, how you use it can also turn it into a compromised halfway house. This month is a case in point, where our usage moved us away from the warm comfort blanket of home charging. At which point you get neither the BEV smugness of a big zero emission range, nor the efficiency of pure petrol power given it's dragging a battery about.

I never stopped to charge en route on any of this month's long journeys, because why? In the 26 minutes Skoda reckons it'd take to get from 10–80 per cent, I could be a lot further down the motorway. In a BEV it'd be another matter, but with a PHEV the second powertrain just keeps you trucking.

However, the 45 litre fuel tank is at least 10 litres smaller than the rest of the non-PHEV Kodiaq range, and while I've only filled it nine times in six months I've yet to get more than 39 litres into it. Meaning you arrive home after a 350 mile round trip with both tank and battery effectively empty. At which point my cocky *mañana, mañana* attitude falls flat.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1498cc 4cyl turbo petrol + e-motor and 25.7kWh battery, 6spd auto, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 201bhp, 258lb ft, 0-62mph in 8.4secs, 130mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,977kg
ECONOMY: 565mpg, 11g/km CO₂

MILES SO FAR 7,494 **OUR MPG** 61.7

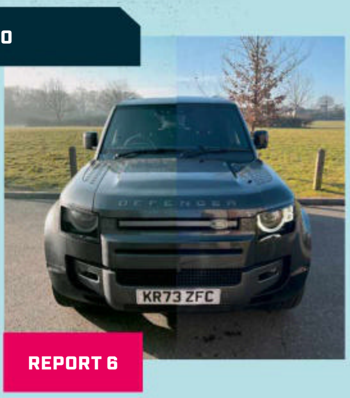
LR DEFENDER 130

I don't want to overstate this but… fridge in the armrest: one of humanity's greatest achievements

Wireless charging pad annoyingly hidden under lip of centre console cover – fiddly to place perfectly

Dash shelf looks utilitarian and chunky, plus you can lob stuff into it on the move

Rearview camera not necessary because there's actual rear visibility and it makes my eyes hurt



REPORT 6

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 130

£115,435/£117,375/£1,784

WHY IT'S HERE: Is the biggest Defender the best?

DRIVER: *JACK RIX*

I FIND MYSELF IN A QUANDARY with the Defender 130, because as we all know Defenders (and off roaders in general) always look better with a bit of dirt. They just do. This plays perfectly into my inherent laziness – less car washing, cooler looking car.

Which is why, and I'm slightly disgusted with myself for saying this, I've not washed the Defender since it arrived. I've hoovered and wiped down the interior several times, I'm not an animal, but a full scrub? Nope.

There's method to my bone idleness though, because washing our particular Defender 130 V8 fundamentally changes its character. Covered in dirt it blends seamlessly into country life, clean and shiny with its black on black it looks like I'm off to sell crack to the kids. You see my dilemma.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 5000cc supercharged V8, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 493bhp, 450lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.4secs, 149mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,670kg
ECONOMY: 19.6mpg, 325g/km CO₂

MILES SO FAR 5,975 **OUR MPG** 19.8

REPORT 4

Our big electric van has had its toughest test to date

CITROEN e-SPACETOURER

£54,375 OTR/£56,960 as tested/£469 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:
Is a giant battery powered MPV really a good idea?

DRIVER: *ROWAN HORNCASTLE*

IF EVER THERE WAS A MONTH for *TG*'s family van to shine, it was this month. Due to a logistical FUBAR, I needed something with seating for six and capacious enough to swallow camera gear for a commercial video shoot, all the while ensuring warmth, safety, and comfort over two night shoots in London. Thankfully, I had Sam's Citroen e-SpaceTourer to rely on.

My 120 mile journey should've been well within its limits – a bit of motorway, then straight into the congestion and 20mph speed limits of London. But it was -1°C. And forgetting to pack my warm clothes to drive in, I whacked up the heating – and lost 30 per cent battery in 20 miles, over two days managing 1.2mpkWh.

As a subtle London low speed camera car, it was great: 20mph is its safe zone for dynamics, as any faster you really feel the near two and a half tonne kerbweight (and suspension unsophistication) over speed bumps. But the bonus of our spec is that the driver can deploy his rear gimbal gunner by sliding the side door to allow them to lean into their harness and shoot out the side. A real win.

So, the Citroen got us out of a sticky situation. But just like its predecessor, its range is the limiting factor.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 75kWh battery, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 134bhp, 221lb ft, 0–62mph in 13.1 secs, 81mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,136kg
ECONOMY: 3.2mpkWh, 221 miles

MILES SO FAR 1,230 **OUR MPKWH** 1.2

REPORT 5

VOLKSWAGEN ID.7

£51,550/£52,030 /£478

WHY IT'S HERE: To discover if VW has actually mastered electrification

DRIVER: *JASON BARLOW*

VW'S TRANSITION TO electrification has been bumpy. There's no question the ID.3 was a rush job, and it sounds like I'm damning the ID.7 with faint praise to say it's better than any of the other IDs. But it unquestionably is.

It's also on a par with a few other cars you might not expect it to be. I'm talking about you, Mercedes-Benz EQS 450+ and Polestar 4. A slightly odd three-car comparison, but useful in working out the state of play circa early 2025.

Driving both of those made me appreciate the ID.7 all the more. It's obviously nothing like as plush as the Merc, but it's on a par in terms of refinement and feels just as well made. It's not as sharply tailored as the Polestar and isn't as dynamic, but it's easier and more intuitive to use. The ID.7 flies under the radar but deserves your attention.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 77kWh battery, RWD
PERFORMANCE: 282bhp, 402lb ft, 0–62mph in 6.5secs, 112mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,172kg
ECONOMY: 4.7mpkWh, 383 miles

MILES SO FAR 3,750 **OUR MPKWH** 3.6

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GOODBYE

BMW i5 TOURING

£79,355 OTR/£93,395 as tested/£1,274 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: Is an XXL dad wagon still a versatility king when it's electric?

DRIVER: ANDY FRANKLIN

WELL PLAYED BMW, YOU GOT ME thinking EVs might just work! Regular readers will know I'm not the biggest EV fan in the world, but I'm surprised to say the i5 was not disappointing. It's not perfect but shows great promise.

BMW claims up to 327 miles on a full charge but in the real world it was 250–300 in the summer, in winter about 200–250 depending on the journey. The best thing was I never experienced range anxiety. If the dial says 234 miles, you'll know you'll do 234 miles. For me, that's pivotal for EV running.

Less good was the length – five metres! You feel like you need a bus licence when parking, plus tight multistoreys are a test of nerves. And four wheel steering didn't help.

I wouldn't recommend the white interior if you have kids. But it was comfortable for everyone. And whisper quiet, even for hours on potholed roads. I'd always step out feeling fresh.

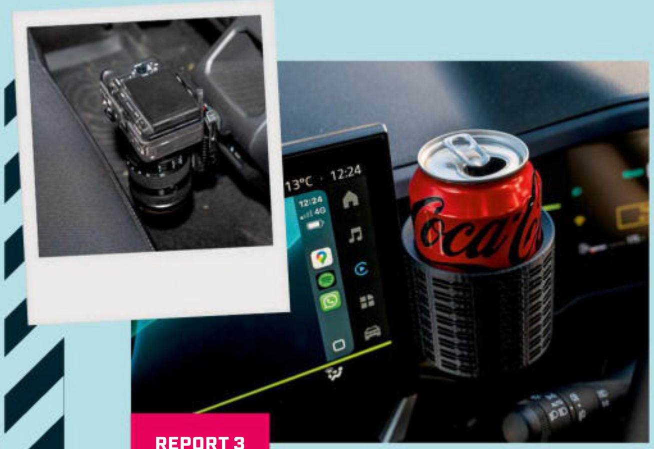
Talking of potholes, the adaptive suspension soaks every imperfection up – it made long distance driving feel effortless.

I thought I'd merely tolerate the i5 Touring. Instead, I've loved it. It's quiet, smooth, effortlessly quick, and packed with tech. Sure, it's long, and the rear legroom isn't amazing, but the pros massively outweigh the cons.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 81.2kWh battery, RWD
PERFORMANCE: 335bhp, 295lb ft, 0–62mph in 6.1secs, 120mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,255kg
ECONOMY: 3.5mpkWh, 327 miles

MILES SO FAR 11,012 OUR MPKWH 3.1



REPORT 3

DACIA DUSTER

£25,945 OTR/£26,595 as tested/£128 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: The Duster now looks funky and has gone hybrid: still a budget hero?

DRIVER: CHARLIE ROSE

IF THERE'S ONE THING I APPRECIATE IN A CAR, IT'S A bit of clever design. The Dacia Duster isn't overloaded with fancy tech, but it does have a smart, practical feature called YouClip – a modular mounting system around the car designed to hold various accessories. Dacia offers a few attachments, like a phone holder and a cupholder, but I had some ideas to take it even further.

This is where 3D printing comes into play. To test things out, I downloaded the plans for a drinks can holder from Thingiverse (thanks to the designer, '_Maxime_') and set about printing it. Blast, it didn't quite reach the recessed YouClip mount. But then I found a solution... a YouClip mount extension.

That success got me thinking, what else could I create? As *TG*'s head of video, I often need quick access to my camera while filming. So I modified the mount extension into a quick release camera mount that sits behind the centre console. Now, instead of fumbling around for my camera, I can grab it in seconds.

That's the beauty of 3D printing, you don't have to be an expert to experiment. Now I just need to think of the next YouClip accessory to print. A sunglasses holder? A snack tray for long journeys? Maybe I'll just keep adding cupholders until I run out of space. Time to fire up the printer and find out.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1598cc turbo 4cyl, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 139bhp, 109lb ft, 0–62mph in 9.8secs, 106mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,380kg
ECONOMY: 56.5mpg, 114g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 3,675 OUR MPG 53.9

Ricci's GARAGE

REPORT 57

THIS MONTH: MARK'S GAMBLING AGAIN... ON A THIRD (UNSEEN) MITSUBISHI PAJERO

Welcome everyone to round 57 of *Ricci's Garage* bingo, and for those first time players this might be a little different to the bingo you're familiar with. You won't find any Dryrobe garms here nor will you be listening to Jess Glynne on repeat for three hours. Instead, you'll witness a man trying to justify his automotive related horrors, repeating the same mistakes in the hope the end result is slightly different. Plot twist: the end result is always the same.

If you look at this month's card you'll see *Ricci's Garage* bingo is littered with many familiar topics. Top left, we have 'the GT-R needs another engine' followed by 'the M6 refresh is about to bankrupt me'. In the top right, you'll see 'more off road wheels purchased' with the classic 'I've bought a car unseen and it's crap' under it. For the bottom row, we have 'sending money abroad and hoping it's not a scam' joined by 'the 911 has a new warning light'. In the middle, you'll see the red bonus ball that simply reads 'Pajero'.

That's because this month's winning card really is a greatest hits of all the above. Not only have I bought another Mitsubishi Pajero, but I bought it completely unseen.

This MkI three door Pajero (Shogun) was for sale in the UK, but it was priced very cheaply on the UK MkI Pajero Owners' Club Facebook group. Given how popular these cars are in extra curricular activities like cash machine theft and among those with no fixed postal address, a cheap MkI is the equivalent of wearing a meat bikini and diving into the Amazon river.

"Someone is coming around to look at it this afternoon unfortunately," the seller told me after I'd asked to buy it. Naturally, this could not go unpunished, so minutes later I'd transferred him the money allowing me to feel smug that I'd snagged a bargain. And then it turned up.

Its 2.5-litre turbodiesel engine runs, but rather than pistons it's powered by an improv jazz drummer who seems to be constantly falling down a flight of stairs. The paint has been reapplied using a paint roller. Either that, or an Old English sheepdog has bathed in green paint before being allowed to roll over every panel. The term 'prep' may have been lost at this stage too – no masking or sanding was used to protect parts that didn't need paint. Like the headlights. But at least they exist, which is more than can be said for various rubber trim pieces around the windows. Also, the inside now smells so strong even someone with a penchant for Chinese wet markets might consider it a bit of a hazard.

And do you know what the worst thing is? I don't care about any of that, because I am once again utterly in love with a horrid excuse of a Pajero. One that somehow still has an MoT certificate, which must have been done via wifi in a previous life. I can't even begin to tell you what the plans are for it – my Pajero Evo has a blown engine and my other MkI needs more welding. What's most annoying is the fact I now need to find another MkI Pajero with a bubble shape roof to replace it. But we'll save that adventure for a future game of bingo.

Renowned photographer Mark has been working with* TopGear *for many, many years. When not taking photos he's buying inappropriate cars. Here he shares his addiction with the world

REPORT 4

> "It so happens I don't mind refilling the washer bottle"

PEUGEOT 3008

£38,535 OTR/£39,135 as tested/£360 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:

Is the striking looking Peugeot 3008 a style-over-substance crossover?

DRIVER: *ESTHER NEVE*

BRITISH WEATHER BEING WHAT it is, over the past couple of months, the roads have been filthy – this means the 3008 has been slurping through the screenwash at a remarkable rate. Even with Peugeot's delightfully named 'magic wash system' – where the washer nozzles are on the wiper arms, meaning less fluid is necessary than with traditional bonnet nozzles and also that the washer fluid is always dispatched to exactly where it is needed – the 3008 seems to get through the reservoir a touch on the speedy side. And I'm not a fanatical windscreen washer either.

It so happens I don't mind refilling the washer reservoir, what I *do* mind is the lack of a warning that I'm going to need to refill it. I hate it when the motorway is wet with salty grime and you run out of washer juice once you've wiped the screen. You end up with a totally opaque windscreen that is impossible to see through.

This got me thinking about washer fluid reservoirs. After a research blitz, I discovered the new 3008 has a surprisingly small tank – just two litres. The heavy lifting is done by the magic wash system. My recommendation to Peugeot would be *at least* to introduce a low washer bottle warning light, and try to increase the tank size.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1199cc 3cyl turbo, FWD

PERFORMANCE: 138bhp, 170lb ft, 0–62mph in 10.2secs, 125mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,573kg

ECONOMY: 44.6mpg, 124g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 4,300 **OUR MPG** 47.9

REPORT 5

CUPRA BORN

£44,625/£46,697/£442

WHY IT'S HERE:

Can this livened up EV prove that electric hot hatches are worth a go?

DRIVER: *JOE HOLDING*

I'VE BEEN ON AN EMOTIONAL journey with the Born. I questioned Paul Horrell giving it a 9/10 when he first drove it, and ended up eating humble pie when I tried it a couple of months later.

So you can imagine my reaction when Greg asked me to see what the VZ was like on track as part of our hot hatch group test. I tiptoe along the pit exit before nailing it towards the first hairpin. Next up is a fast right hander. I throw the VZ in and... ah. Straight away I'm a passenger. Similar story next corner as I plant the brake pedal into the corner. Off comes the speed, but not quickly enough.

I stand by it being way better than expected, but there's no doubt those talents run out very quickly when exposed to a proper test like a racetrack.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 79kWh battery, RWD

PERFORMANCE: 322bhp, 402lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.6secs, 124mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,999kg

ECONOMY: 4.1mpkWh, 366 miles

MILES SO FAR 2,540 **OUR MPKWH** 3.3

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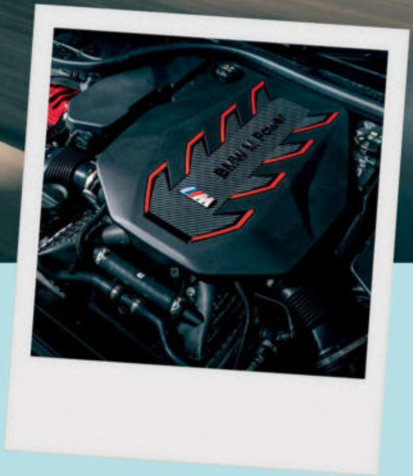
HELLO

"It's huge, both in its dimensions and how big it feels"



BMW M5

£111,405 OTR/£131,950 as tested/£1,587 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:

Furiously complex, huge and heavy – is the M5 headed in the right direction?

DRIVER: *Ollie Marriage*

DID YOU TUNE IN FOR THE TWIN test? The M5 losing to the Audi RS7? Bit of an upset that. I don't think a BMW M car has lost to an RS Audi since the B7 RS4 proved to be, well, Audi hasn't done it better than that in the last 20 years.

And BMW hasn't done it worse? That's what we're going to find out. But before I go any further, introductions are in order. This is the new BMW G90 M5. It's painted Fire Red, factually inaccurate name but a great colour (and free), and fitted with £20,625 of options which, to work from the bottom up, consist of a charging cable (£350), black painted wheels (£375), silver threads in the carbon fibre (£400) and the Ultimate pack (£19,500). Quite a jump for that last one there.

Initial impressions, then. It's huge, both in terms of its dimensions and how big it feels from the driver's seat. I have to raise the seat quite a bit to get a proper perspective of the road. The seats envelop me in a hug. Getting that right took lots of screen fiddling, that's where half the seat controls are – anyone overwrites my settings, I'll have a meltdown.

But one word keeps niggling at my subconscious: gentlemanly. Every generation of M5 has been gentlemanly. They're not brash or overstated, they have a certain dignity. See where I'm going with this? Because it's not just the styling of this new car that's a bit clunky, there's been a more fundamental shift here. It's in the vast illuminated grille, the gaudy ambient lighting, the self important start up bongs, the off putting screen complexity, the awful angular dash graphics. It's trying too hard.

Relaxed athleticism, that's what an M5 should deliver. Maybe this one will. Maybe I'll come away convinced the M5 is a better car than the RS7 that Rowan's been running. But right now it feels a bit tense and uptight.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 4395cc TT V8 + e-motor, AWD

PERFORMANCE: 717bhp, 737lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.5secs, 155mph

KERBWEIGHT: 2,435kg

ECONOMY: 176.6mpg, 34g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 2,654 **OUR MPG** 33.7

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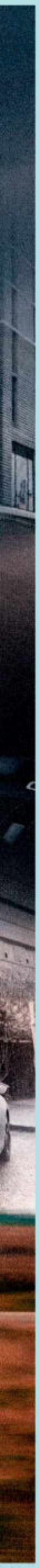


GOODBYE

VAUXHALL ASTRA GSE TOURING

£44,000 **OTR**/£44,500 **as tested**/£374 **pcm**

WHY IT'S HERE:
The VXR badge is dead, now we've got GSE. What's it all about?

DRIVER: *VIJAY PATTNI*

HERE IS A STORY ABOUT A GREY hybrid Vauxhall estate, made by a company that's shutting up shop in the town it's most associated with. Vauxhall Motors began trading in Luton back in 1905, and now, after 120 years, it has announced the closure of the remaining Bedfordshire plant where it makes vans. Look, here it is, in the picture on the top left.

Sad times. Vauxhall's steadily been closing off its Luton sites for a while now, like this one (top right) that used to be its main factory but is now a set of apartments (all named after Vauxhall models).

Or this one (middle left) that used to be its parts warehouse, where your correspondent once toiled over the summers.

Or this one that (middle right) used to be its Luton headquarters, where your correspondent once did work experience.

A reminder that all endeavour is ephemeral, but also a reminder that making cars (and vans) in a rapidly changing world is tricky and unpredictable. A bit like this Astra GSE wagon's brakes, which over the course of our six month custody, remained consistently... inconsistent. And while Vauxhall's Luton presence was once a powerhouse, the same can't be said of this Astra GSE, because it never really felt all that... powerful.

GSE – short for 'Grand Sport Electric' – is Vauxhall's new era performance badge, taking over from beardy wonders like GTE and SRI and GSI and VXR. Sounds like it belongs, but those cars had a distinct offering – they were a bit mad. This one definitely isn't.

It's definitely sensible, and very definitely annoying. For what's supposed to be a performance estate, the powertrain remained unconvincing: a plug-in hybrid setup that matched a 1.6-litre four cylinder petrol engine to a battery and electric motor. The electric bit was good, but we never gelled with that engine and gearbox combo.

And while it handled decently, utilising its fancy dampers and sportier chassis to good effect, nothing ever really sparkled. And while it looked handsome on the outside, on the inside its user interface was a bit glitchy. Comfortable seats. Cramped rear bench.

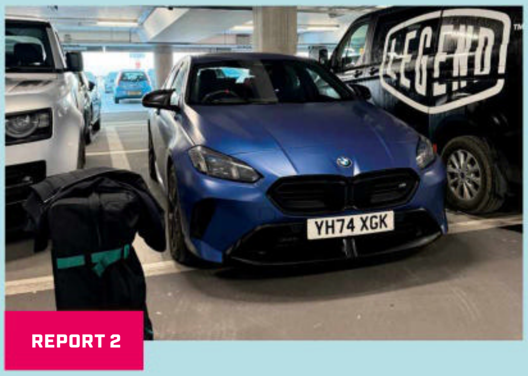
There are cheaper Astra wagons on offer, and there'll be an electric one too. What this GSE needed is a large dose of what made the old VXR so endearing: lunacy. A properly sorted engine and sharp witted gearbox would make a world of difference. As would a more performance oriented interior. A racier exterior. A distinct personality.

Until that happens, it will remain a... grey, hybrid estate made by a company that's shutting up shop in the town it's most associated with.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1598cc turbo 4cyl + e-motor, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 223bhp, 265lb ft, 0–62mph in 7.5secs, 146mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,746kg
ECONOMY: 256mpg, 25g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 8,961 **OUR MPG** 41.4



REPORT 2

BMW M135

£43,740 **OTR**/£54,050 **as tested**/£602 **pcm**

WHY IT'S HERE: It's about time BMW had a hot hatch worthy of the M badge again

DRIVER: *JETHRO BOVINGDON*

THE M135 FEELS PROPERLY QUICK WHEN YOU wring it out, but the pure performance isn't delivered with much drama or excitement. In fact, the four cylinder engine sounds strained and tuneless. A million miles from the silken, cultured straight six in the early generations of rear drive 1-Series.

It comes to define it in a round about way, too. Not because it sparkles, but because it's highly effective but lacks polish and a real sense of urgency. The same conclusion could be applied to the car as a whole. There's grip and response but very little adjustability and the one dimensional balance is so determined that it's difficult to feel truly involved.

Perhaps I'm asking too much? Well, maybe. But I do wonder who's the target customer. On paper the M135 is so appealing and it should really be a sharper, more playful take on a Golf R or S3. A uniquely BMW flavoured hot hatch. Instead it has some hot hatch compromises – tyre noise, a pretty jagged low speed ride and a sharp DCT box that can make low speed manoeuvring a little tricky – but the car doesn't pay you back in terms of raw excitement. It's like it can't quite bring itself to just have fun.

As you can probably tell, we have yet to bond. The potential is right there, j-u-s-t out of reach. By failing to really exploit what this platform should deliver, BMW has actually ended up in a kind of hot hatch no man's land. Right now it's a pretty cool thing to run to the airport in, but shouldn't it be so much more?

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1998cc turbo 4cyl, 4WD
PERFORMANCE: 296bhp, 295lb ft, 0–62mph in 4.9secs, 155mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,550kg
ECONOMY: 36.7mpg, 175g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 4,387 **OUR MPG** 35.6

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HELLO

MG CYBERSTER

£54,995 OTR/£55,540 as tested/£970 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: Because it's quite simply the only purely electric sports car in the world (for now…)

DRIVER: OLLIE KEW

WELL, THIS REALLY OUGHT TO BE fascinating. The MG Cyberster is like no other car on sale. And we've been lent one, to daily drive, for at least half a year.

There are so many threads to pull on here. The Chinese backed resurrection of a beleaguered but admired British brand, topping a range of sensible hatchbacks and crossovers with a £55k droptop. Is anyone going to take it seriously?

This is MG's first new sports car since the 1990s. It's the only two seater EV cabrio in production today – and only the second ever, after the original Lotus based Tesla Roadster. Is there a reason for that?

And yes, it's got electric scissor doors. Will they go wrong? Will they get annoying? Yes. Whoops. We're not supposed to answer the introduction questions yet. Friends, we will not be short of things to talk about here.

We have been very particular about which model of Cyberster we chose to run, because anyone who pays attention to EVs understands the core rule. Don't Buy The Fast One.

Want a Mustang Mach-E? Avoid the GT. Shopping for a Taycan? Go 4S, not Turbo S. Almost all EVs are fast. Going for an ultra rapid one is always diminishing returns. Spend a load more money, get to 60mph half a second quicker, make a 50 per cent sacrifice in range.

So, when MG launched the Cyberster it made a jolly big fuss about the flagship GT spec. Dual motors, four wheel drive and over 500 horsepower for just less than £60,000. Forget a Boxster – a top spec of Cyberster will outrun a bloomin' Porsche Carrera GT.

And… we've ignored it. Partly because there was always a suspicion the Cyberster's chassis was out of its depth trying to instantly stamp 500bhp onto the road. But mostly because there are mathematically quantifiable reasons the RWD 'Trophy' model should be the smarter bet.

One: range. Giving up a power hungry front motor means the WLTP lab range leaps from 276 miles to 316 miles. That's 40 miles further, every charge, just for being happy to make do with a mere 350bhp.

Second: weight. Lopping off the front motor makes the car a bit less nose heavy. The claimed kerbweight drops from 1,985kg to 1,885kg. The 0–62mph time increases from 3.2 to 5.0secs, and both flavours top out at just beyond 120mph.

Third: price. An AWD, 500bhp Cyberster GT is £59,995. This RWD 340bhp Cyberster Trophy is £54,995. And does it look £5k less expensive? The only tell is 19 inch wheels instead of 20s. There are

“The core rule with EVs is Don’t Buy The Fast One”

MG door and cabrio buttons look much like a series of yoga poses

no badges or body panels that give away which model is which. The only optional extra selected on our car is the inoffensive Cosmic Silver paintwork, for £595.

It’s worth pointing out that MG reckons no one will care about any of this common sense. If it does actually sell any Cybersters, they’re more likely to be GTs: the monthly payments aren’t dramatically different and someone enthusiastic enough about an e-softtop to want such a left field car is probably going to fancy the extra poke. But we’re here to be thorough, right?

First impressions have been… mixed. The Cyberster landed in frigid February and the best range I’ve seen so far has barely topped 250 miles. It’s far from inefficient, returning three miles per kWh from 74kWh of usable battery. It’s already turning heads and confounding guesses on its value (a neighbour reckoned it was “Six figures, gottabe?”). Like I said, lots to get our teeth into.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 74kWh battery, RWD
PERFORMANCE: 335bhp, 350lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.0secs, 121mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,885kg
ECONOMY: 4.2mpkWh, 316 miles

MILES SO FAR 6,475 **OUR MPKWH** 3.0

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TG TIP
The £18k 3 trim has best blend of price and tech with heated seats and wireless phone charging

1

KIA PICANTO

PRICE: £15,845–£18,745

Fizzy, frugal and fun to drive, the tiny Picanto has been refined over three generations since 2003. The latest model got a welcome style injection when it was facelifted in 2023. There are surprisingly generous kit levels on offer, too

Aimed at: canny pensioners, new drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

HYUNDAI i10

PRICE: £16,380–£18,980

This tiny hatchback feels very grown up from behind the wheel, and the i10 is an eminently sensible city car choice with a strong spec. Great on holiday, too

Aimed at: car rental agencies

3

FIAT 500e

PRICE: £24,995–£33,995

One of the original retro tribute acts has matured into an EV while holding to its roots. Back's cramped, but there's still room for soft toys on the parcel shelf

Aimed at: retro hungry millennials

4

TOYOTA AYGO X

PRICE: £16,515–£20,540

What do you get if you cross a city car and an SUV? The Aygo X, apparently – much cooler than the old Aygo, but that X is only worth 11mm of ride height

Aimed at: the kids

5

CITROEN AMI

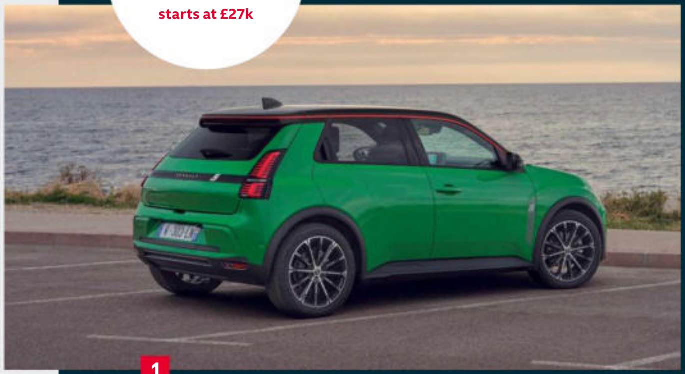
PRICE: £7,695–£8,095

Unlike the other cars here, the Ami really is just for the city, with a range of up to 46 miles and a top speed of 30mph. Still, quicker than getting the bus

Aimed at: antisocial commuters

SUPERMINIS

TG TIP
Techno trim with the 52kWh battery is the best all rounder and starts at £27k



1

RENAULT 5

PRICE: £22,995–£28,995

There's a delicate line to tread with a retro modern take on a stone cold classic, but Renault has managed it well with its new 5. Nods to the past abound, but that doesn't stop the supermini from being a great all round small electric car

Aimed at: retrospectives

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SUZUKI SWIFT

PRICE: £19,199–£21,549

Latest version of the Swift shows that cheap can still leave you feeling cheerful, especially with low monthly costs and the right kit levels

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

RENAULT CLIO

PRICE: £18,595–£24,895

The hybrid version works out a bit expensive, but the Clio is as solid a buy as it ever was – a proven package with a bit of added French flair

Aimed at: Nicole, papa, *toute la famille*

4

MINI COOPER

PRICE: £23,270–£39,120

New Mini takes the car on in all the right ways, with a sharp exterior design and tech-focused interior that's fun but still useful. Ride's a bit firm, though

Aimed at: young professionals/estate agents

5

SKODA FABIA

PRICE: £20,295–£26,195

No electric whizzery here, just a great all-rounder with a solid 1.0-litre 3cyl petrol engine and some nifty interior touches (like the door umbrella)

Aimed at: sensible folks

FAMILY HATCHBACKS

TG TIP
Hybrid only, and stick to entry level **Elegance** trim for decent kit and best economy

1

HONDA CIVIC

PRICE: £35,005–£39,805

The strange thing about the Honda Civic is how wildly it veers from one generation to the next – you get a crazy one, then a sensible one, a crazy one... This current version is the sensible one, but that's not a bad thing – it might be conservative on the outside, but the interior is simply put together and to a high standard. You won't mind long family journeys, and you know that it'll all last for miles and miles. There's a strangely complex hybrid setup under the bonnet, but you needn't worry about all that, because the upshot is that the car drives and handles well enough, but won't cost you the earth in petrol bills. See, sometimes it does pay to be a little sensible. Though if you do want the Civic to be a bit crazy you can always go for the Type R version, which delivers in spades

Aimed at: spreadsheet users

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SKODA OCTAVIA

PRICE: £27,390–£40,390

There must be a few noses out of joint in the darkest corporate depths of the VW Group – of the host of cars based on the MkVIII Golf, the Skoda's the best

Aimed at: people with sensible shoes

3

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF

PRICE: £27,760–£45,785

Long the benchmark in this sector, the crown has slipped a little in this eighth generation guise. We wouldn't count the Golf out for long though

Aimed at: everyone

4

MG4

PRICE: £26,995–£36,495

Popped up out of nowhere to become one of the easiest to recommend electric family hatchbacks around. Even looks good in orange

Aimed at: early adopters/taxi drivers

5

RENAULT MEGANE E-TECH

PRICE: £33,995–£37,995

The strange thing about the latest Megane is that it doesn't excel anywhere, but overall adds up to a great family car that happens to be electric too

Aimed at: stylish school runs

BEST KIT CAR

CATERHAM SEVEN

PRICE: from £29,490

To be honest, it doesn't usually end well when we try to make a car ourselves, but if we were going to it would definitely be a Seven. This back to basics sports car is worth all of the swearing. The entry 170 is strangely appealing, but the 620's 310bhp is absolutely mesmerising

Aimed at: spannerers

HOT HATCHES

TG TIP
Don't be tempted by the £3.8k **Carbon Pack**, it's expensive enough as it is...

1

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

PRICE: £50,050

Forget the slightly traditional setup of our 2022 Car of the Year, Honda's Type R follows the original hot hatch template fairly slavishly but it has kept it feeling brilliantly fresh. The electric ones have a lot of work to do if they want to compete

Aimed at: purists

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

TOYOTA GR YARIS

PRICE: £44,250–£60,000

The best Toyota ever? It really could be. This first version was a hoot to drive – fun at all speeds in all weathers. Updated one gets more bhp and an auto

Aimed at: cognoscenti

3

FORD FOCUS ST

PRICE: £37,705–£42,905

Practically Jurassic these days, but with a top notch drive this old stager can still show the youngsters where to go, particularly in ST Edition spec

Aimed at: budget purists

4

AUDI S3

PRICE: £47,550–£53,025

The S3 got much better when Audi chucked in the RS3's trick rear diff at the last facelift – this mature all-rounder parties hard but likes a bit of hummus

Aimed at: single car households

5

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N

PRICE: £65,000

The hot hatch for the computer games generations is rammed full of gimmicks, but is still able to back it up where it really counts – on the road

Aimed at: gamers

CROSSOVERS

TG TIP
Entry level **Air** trim comes pretty well equipped – just go for the bigger battery

1

KIA EV3

PRICE: £32,995–£43,895

The Kianaissance continues apace, with an intriguing small electric effort that's finally delivering some of what we want from EVs. It's stylish, full of interesting details, about as fuss free as electric motoring gets and efficient too

Aimed at: punctual adopters

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

DACIA DUSTER

PRICE: £18,850–£26,850

If you're going to go back to basics then you really need to nail those essentials, which the Duster has managed effortlessly into its second generation

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

VOLVO EX30

PRICE: £32,850–£44,850

The EX30 is full of Scandi cool and delightfully simple to live with. Space is admittedly tight in the back, but the interior quality makes up for it

Aimed at: stylish families

4

FORD PUMA

PRICE: £26,350–£33,600

The UK's official bestseller has taken on the torch of the Fiesta as a decent little car with solid appeal across the board. Just don't mention the old one

Aimed at: everyone

5

HYUNDAI KONA

PRICE: £26,040–£33,165

Korean carmaker's bold design streak continues with the latest Kona, which remains a solid family car. EV's a great first toe in the electric waters

Aimed at: number crunchers

LUXURY SUVs

TG TIP
P510e hybrid is the way to go – in **Vogue SE** trim it's all the Range Rover you'll ever need

1

RANGE ROVER

PRICE: £104,025–£192,000

Arguably the original lifestyle SUV, the Range Rover has evolved massively since the 1970 original, developing into a luxury beast. The latest one hasn't just nailed the brief, it has set the benchmark for everyone else to follow

Aimed at: cash buyers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

VOLVO EX90

PRICE: £96,255–£99,950

The old XC90 was starting to get left behind, but the new EX90 has wrestled its way to the front of the post SUV queue while remaining as charming as ever

Aimed at: polo necks

3

FERRARI PUROSANGUE

PRICE: £313,360

Ferrari says this definitely isn't an SUV, but ironically with its sporty credentials it's probably the most SUV out of all the SUVs that have ever been made

Aimed at: posers

4

ROLLS-ROYCE CULLINAN

PRICE: £298,800–£342,600

Even Rolls-Royce had to follow the money and make an SUV. Fortunately you can't see what it looks like from the back seat – that's the place to enjoy it

Aimed at: old money

5

BMW iX

PRICE: £70,985–£124,605

This tech-laden electric SUV takes a different approach to luxury – it's still comfortable, but it dazzles with interesting materials and nice touches

Aimed at: tech VPs

OFF ROADERS

TG TIP
Just two trims here – pricier **First Edition** is the only way to get round headlights

1

LAND CRUISER

PRICE: £74,995–£79,995

The Toyota was always peerless off road, but it had everything except kerbside appeal – until this stylish retro version arrived. It might be criminal to watch a pedigree rockhopper waste away on the school run, but it gets slippery in Richmond sometimes

Aimed at: peacekeepers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

LAND ROVER DEFENDER

PRICE: £58,310–£160,800

Everyone had an opinion about the classic Defender, but no one was buying. Now it's selling at 10x the rate and the full fat OCTA takes it further than ever

Aimed at: school run mums

3

MERCEDES-BENZ G-CLASS

PRICE: £136,690–£203,595

The looks of the G-Wagen are the same as they've ever been, but that masks the progress that's been made under the skin. The new electric one is fun

Aimed at: original gangsters

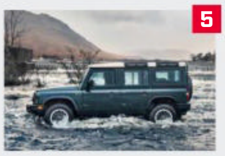
4

FORD RANGER

PRICE: £35,130–£62,557

Like a good pair of jeans, the Ranger is able to switch seamlessly from work to play, no wonder it's a trades favourite. A little bit large for parts of the UK though

Aimed at: sole traders



5

INEOS GRENADIER

PRICE: £65,015–£79,140

A passion project from a rich old billionaire who wanted a modernised version of his compromised old 4x4. Fair enough, seems to have managed it

Aimed at: old rich men

SPORTS CARS

TG TIP
Into driving? Carrera T. For everyday use, it's the base Carrera with Heritage Design interior

1

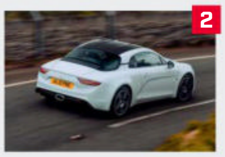
PORSCHE 911

PRICE: £99,800–£139,100

The definitive sports car, despite its inherent layout flaws, because it's been ruthlessly honed millimetre by millimetre over the past 70 years by people who really know what they're doing. Newly facelifted 992.2 version even has a hybrid option

Aimed at: heavyweights

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

ALPINE A110

PRICE: £54,490–£91,940

This stripped down French number has managed to take up the baton for feathery, beautifully handling sports cars since Lotus gave up trying

Aimed at: lightweights

3

TOYOTA GR86

PRICE: £32,495

The back to basics sports car is destined to be a future classic, and it's one of the best cars that Toyota's made (but it's no GR Yaris)

Aimed at: purists

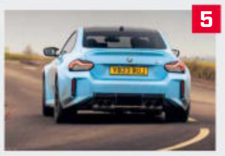
4

PORSCHE 718 CAYMAN GTS

PRICE: £75,300

Sure, it's getting old, but the Cayman is one of those compelling driver's cars that we need to celebrate while they're still allowed to be on sale

Aimed at: B-road blasters



5

BMW M2

PRICE: £67,055

The latest version of the BMW M2 is more grown up than it used to be, but doesn't that apply to us all? It's a great daily driver that grows on you over time

Aimed at: wealthier purists

SUPERCARS

TG TIP
Don't have the £6,250 super lightweight carbon seats. Regular buckets are much better

1

McLAREN 750S

PRICE: £244,760

Launched in 2023 as a successor to the 720S, McLaren really stepped it up with this car – it's better to drive than its predecessor, but crucially it's also better to sit in and easier to operate. It even comes with Apple CarPlay...

Aimed at: rich Shanghai drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

FERRARI 296 GTB

PRICE: £241,550

People got nervous when they heard this Ferrari supercar would be a V6 hybrid... they needn't have worried, it all serves to make it a better drive

Aimed at: self-made business people

3

LAMBORGHINI REVUELTO

PRICE: £446,742

There's hybrid tech in there, but there's also a socking V12 in what could very well be the best Lamborghini since the iconic 1960s Miura

Aimed at: high rollers

4

PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS

PRICE: £192,600

You've got to be a good driver to get the most out of the GT3 RS's repertoire, but Porsche has thrown everything it has at this racer for the road

Aimed at: amateur racers

5

McLAREN ARTURA

PRICE: £189,200

The conservative exterior serves to hide some big developments under the skin – ssh, but the Artura might even be a better daily driver than the 296 GTB

Aimed at: brave buyers

HYPERCARS

TG TIP
It'd be sacrilegious to change anything on Gordon's car, but he'll paint it how you like

1

GMA T.50

PRICE: £2.8 MILLION

Gordon Murray had already done it all with the McLaren F1 back in the 1990s, but you always sensed he had a bit more to prove. And here's the result, the car that shows lightning doesn't just strike twice, it'll do it exactly where Gordon tells it to. "The last great analogue supercar" was what Gordon Murray promised – and he's delivered it with relentless attention to detail and a dedication to the end prize. With the electric era almost upon us, we'll probably never see the likes of this pure, undiluted V12-powered monster ever again. It's not just the sum of Murray's knowhow and experience distilled into a ruthless hypercar, you can get something out of it without being an F1 driver, it's an enjoyable drive for whoever happens to be behind the wheel. Your move, everyone else

Aimed at: loaded enthusiasts

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

PAGANI UTOPIA

PRICE: £2.2 MILLION

In a truly utopian society we'd all be driving one of these. It's not bad for a third car – easy to forget that Pagani's been very discerning about its model lineup

Aimed at: tech billionaires

3

ASTON MARTIN VALKYRIE

PRICE: £3 MILLION

The 'F1 car for the road' line has become a bit of a cliche, but the Valkyrie is certainly visceral and noisy enough to be considered that way

Aimed at: rich collectors

4

KOENIGSEGG JESKO

PRICE: £2.9 MILLION

Well it's named after the boss's dad, so it had to be a good car – and it is. Certainly worthy of a pat on the head, well done son

Aimed at: Monaco residents

5

BUGATTI CHIRON

PRICE: £3.2 MILLION

If the Veyron was the Volkswagen Group's moonshot, the Chiron reaches for the stars at warp speed. How do you follow this?

Aimed at: old money

MOST LUXURIOUS

ROLLS-ROYCE PHANTOM

PRICE: from £400,000

Lots of cars claim to be premium these days – it doesn't mean much more than a heated seat and a slightly squishy dashboard plastic. Luxury though? Whole different game. And there are few cars that can match the ambience of a Rolls-Royce like this, inside or out...

Aimed at: oligarchs

BIG FAMILY CARS

TG TIP
It only costs £500 extra to go for the **7-seat** over the 5-seat model – a no brainer

1

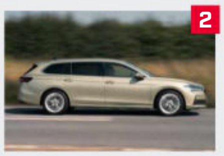
VW ID.BUZZ 7-SEAT

PRICE: £59,545–£67,945

The ID.Buzz is not merely another retro face (that's the sugar on the electric pill), in many ways it's an innovative bit of family transport, especially in its seven-seater guise that finally releases the practicality the car needed

Aimed at: lifestyle families

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

PRICE: £36,995–£48,735

This car has always had to be good with a name like that, but it's hard to think of any other family estate out there that does a better job for the money

Aimed at: posh families

3

BMW i5 TOURING

PRICE: £69,945–£99,995

You wait ages for an electric family estate and then a brilliant one comes along all at once. Shows off all of BMW's electric knowhow and body control wizardry

Aimed at: the outside lane

4

HYUNDAI SANTA FE

PRICE: £46,775–£57,635

Stylish, well built, comfortable and quiet – not to mention loads of room inside for carrying people and stuff. Hyundai's hot streak continues

Aimed at: sensible families

5

DACIA JOGGER

PRICE: £18,400–£24,100

The Jogger is a masterpiece of cutting out the unnecessary (weight *and* money) while maintaining the fundamentals of a useful family estate

Aimed at: clever families

GRAND TOURERS

TG TIP
Got a dog? Aston's got you – the **Pet Pack** throws in a bed and a portable washer

1

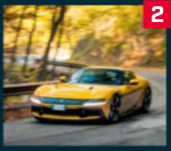
ASTON VANQUISH

PRICE: FROM £330,000

The Vanquish has been reborn – sounds a little grand, but the latest version has brought the car right up to date for its third incarnation. It mixes an exciting drive with genuine grand touring ability in a way that must have all its rivals quaking

Aimed at: secret agents

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

FERRARI 12CILINDRI

PRICE: £336,500

Ferrari has softened the edges off the 12Cilindri's forebears to create a car that's probably the most capable all-rounder to have come out of Maranello

Aimed at: watch collectors

3

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

PRICE: £152,820–£257,700

If you had to drive really far there's probably no car you'd rather be in than the Continental GT. Except maybe a chauffeur driven Phantom of course

Aimed at: pipe smokers

4

PORSCHE 911 TURBO

PRICE: £200,600

The 911 range is like one of those Italian gelaterias with hundreds of flavours – seems excessive, but we love them all. Turbo might be the pick of the bunch

Aimed at: daily drivers

5

MASERATI GRANTURISMO

PRICE: £133,120–£179,950

A GT by name and a true GT by nature – this latest GranTurismo has avoided the temptation to go a little *too* sporty and nails the brief. EV's good too

Aimed at: tassled loafers

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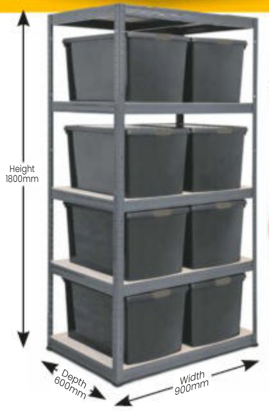

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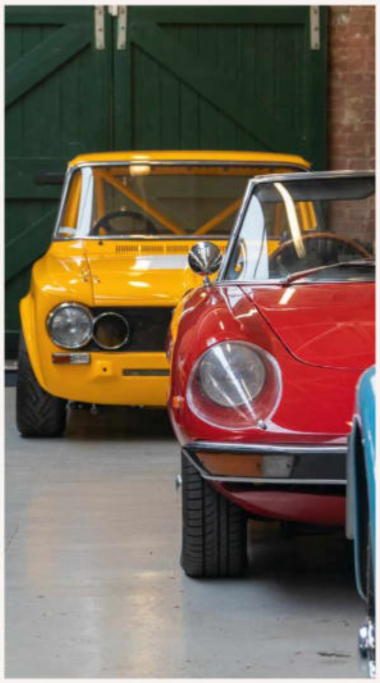

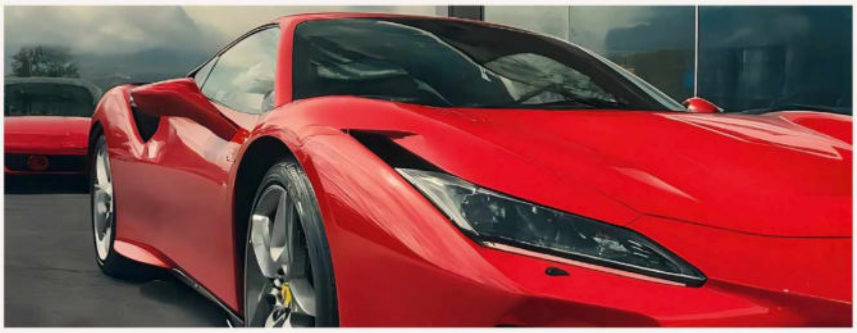

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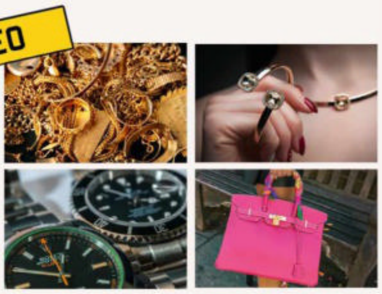

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SHORTLIST

CAR BUYING QUANDARY? SHORTLIST IS AT YOUR SERVICE

Dear *TopGear*,

There are these short people who follow me around everywhere demanding lifts to local schools and minor sporting events – I'm looking for something with lots of seats and a bit of space for all the crap they carry round, what can you recommend?

Jane, Worcester

We're here to help, Jane. We assume you've considered just making them walk everywhere and getting a sports car – the NHS recommends 60mins of moderate daily exercise for 5–18s. The moaning would be unbearable though.

If you've got tiny tots who can't walk far you'll be thinking about Isofix points – the Santa Fe has four (two in each of the back rows) and the Touran a whopping five. Anyone who needs four or more Isofix points deserves our thoughts and prayers.

Stickers with 'Mum's taxi' on belong in the bin, but why not go one better and buy an actual taxi – black cab maker LEVC sells a TX Shuttle model aimed at private hire firms (which is essentially what you are, without the tax benefits). It's a plug-in hybrid – costs around £67k, eurgh, but does 80 miles on a charge and has a little petrol engine to keep you going. There's no Worcestershire source, but LEVC does have a dealer in Birmingham, so that's handy.

Your options...

VOLKSWAGEN TOURAN From £39,960

This is an MPV, kids, the sort of car we drove when houses had landlines and textured wallpaper. The Touran is the coelacanth of the car industry, but that doesn't make it any less practical. It does make it deeply unfashionable, but who cares.

OUR WINNER

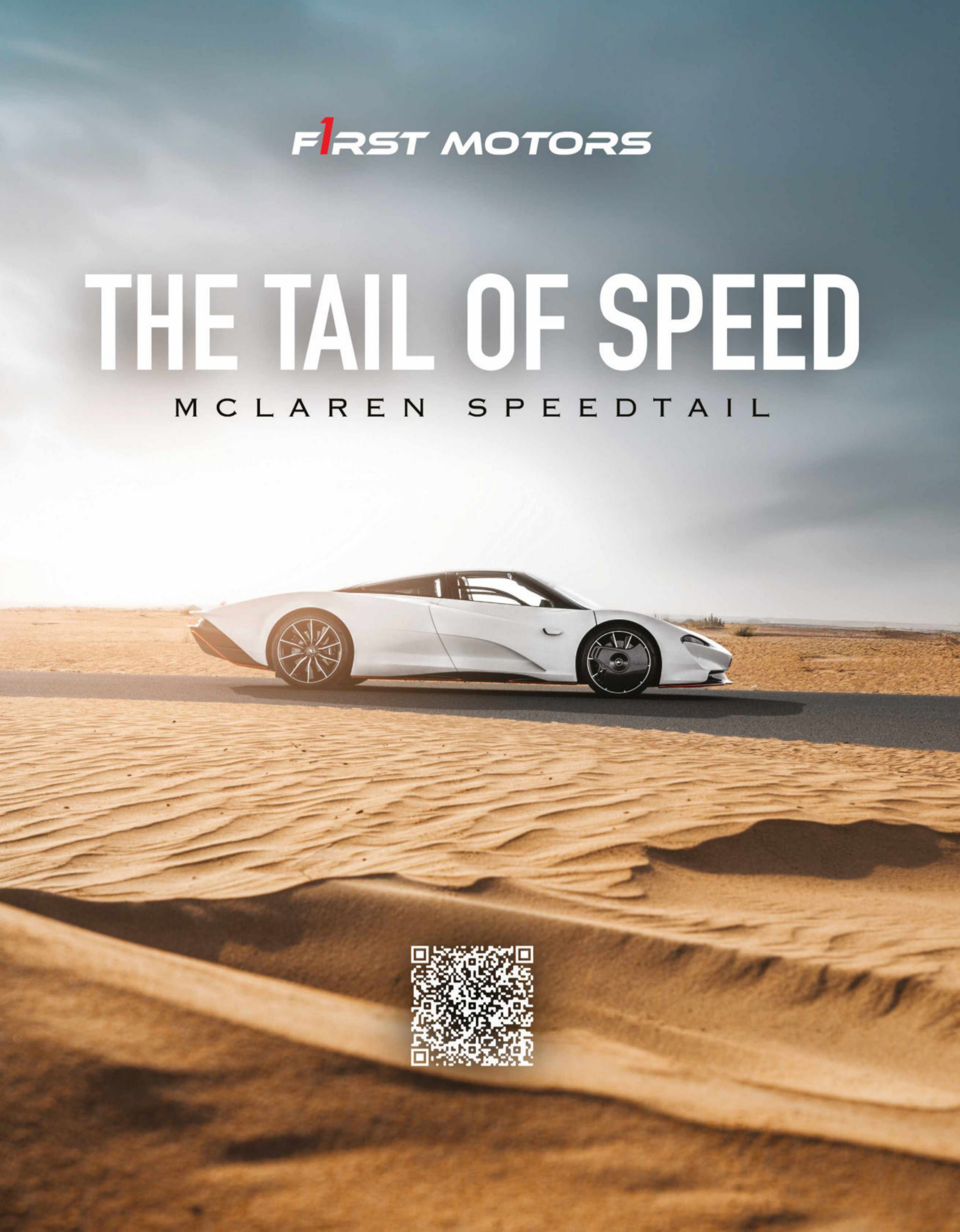
HYUNDAI SANTA FE From £47,200

The new Hyundai Santa Fe looks like it was designed in *Minecraft*, but it's cavernous inside and is filled with lots of great little touches that make everyday life more bearable. Isn't it great when cars are designed by people who use them?

LEVC TX From £58,599

You wouldn't be allowed to drive in bus lanes, but there are six seats in the back and it has Apple CarPlay so you don't need to do The Knowledge. Its main virtue is the plastic screen between the driving seat and passenger cabin. Ah, silence.

WORDS: SAM BURNETT PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY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Maximum range on a full charge for a CUPRA Tavascan is 298.9 - 353.6 miles (official test WLTP figures) depending on the trim. Official fuel consumption for the Tavascan mpg (litres/100km) combined: N/A. Combined CO_2 emissions: 0g/km. Test data obtained under standardised conditions after the battery had been fully charged (to 100%). The Tavascan is a battery electric vehicle requiring mains electricity for charging. Figures shown are for comparability purposes and may vary by trim. Only compare fuel consumption, CO_2 and electric range figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the starting charge of the battery, accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles, route conditions, speed, vehicle and battery age and vehicle load. Zero emissions while driving. Data correct at December 2024.